

This Old House

46
pages of
**DIY money
savers**

75
easy
upgrades
under
\$75

PLUS 7 budget redos:
front entry, kitchen,
living room, more!

...and 13 other ways
to update your house
for (practically)
nothing p. 45

**Simplest
paint idea
ever**
p. 43

BONUS PROJECTS

**Create an
attic retreat**

**Cottage-style
storage cabinet**

**And spooky
Halloween how-to!** p. 21

OCTOBER 2011
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It's amazing what soup can do.

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GET THIS
LOOK FOR
LESS



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WILLIAM LUTHELL
MAGNETIC MEDIA CENTER



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The Great Stuff Pro Magazine

Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2014

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Jeff
Spillane
STAIN EXPERT

When we asked 10k Facebook fans what they'd most like to learn from a Benjamin Moore stain expert, we learned that they have questions on how best to schedule the re-staining of their decks.

Should I re-stain my deck now or wait until next spring?

A. For older decks, it's a good idea to re-stain before winter arrives. Excessive snowfall brought about by a harsh winter and intermittent freeze-thaw cycles in the north, as well as moisture and rot and heat in the south, can cause irreparable damage to wood. In order to protect the wood fibers of your deck, it's best to re-stain it before the old coating breaks down. The mild temperatures we associate with fall fit within the suggested temperature range that's ideal for staining, making re-staining your deck a perfect autumn project.



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Turn in to Ask This Old House during October for expert help with these projects and more. For local listings, visit thisoldhouse.com/backschedule

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letter {from This Old House}

Bump in the night—and the day

When I was a kid we used to like being scared. I don't mean "Oh, no, GHOST Aunt Doris is coming for a visit and she's going to try and kill us with her squibbly moustache!" scared.

I mean more like Orson's board scared. Ghost stories with the lights out scared. Dare you to say "Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary" scared.

Hope you weren't standing in front of a mirror when you read that last one.

Anyway, it was fun to flirt with the supernatural, to go out on Halloween and challenge each other to be down as a graveyard tombstone; to creep up on old Mrs. Jackson's porch late at night to see if she really was a witch. It was fun because we always knew there was a safe place to run to. We always knew we could go home.

And though I still love Halloween, now, in my own home, I don't feel nearly as safe as I did when I was a kid.

It's not Aunt Doris—she's long gone. I guess some of the funning is from the economy, and the worry it brings about always being able to pay the mortgage. The mortgage is that's not supposed to happen where we live but happened anyway didn't help my state of mind either. The biggest part of it, though, has to have been the hurricane, Irene, that also isn't supposed to happen where I live, but left half my neighbor's head swash in floodwater.

In the hours before Irene came ashore, my house, the safe place I tried to assure for my family, suddenly needed its own protection. We boarded our windows and sandbagged our doors, and still we were asked to evacuate. That night, with winds howling and rain beating down—that night when we needed it most—we could not go home.

In the end, my house held strong. The storm did no storm damage elsewhere. And as Irene moved on and we returned, I felt lucky. Lucky but not relieved. Not relieved for the people whose homes were damaged. And not relieved because I might not be so lucky next time.

Which leaves me wondering. Surely many TOH readers have been affected by natural disasters, if not Irene herself. So how about you? How do you deal with the realizations that having a home—keeping the structure and refuge that you pour so much time and effort and love into—might not be your choice but Mother Nature's? If you have a thought and some wine, please drop me a note. I'd like to share what you think with the rest of the TOH readers.



**scared at
DORIS** The editor of *Where We Live* is preparing for his annual Halloween. See it all Pumpkin Illustrations: These days there's rain and rumbles more than ghosts and goblins.

Scott Chappelle
SCOTT CHAPPELLE, EDITOR
SCOTT@thisoldhouse.com

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readermail

Even though readers entered the Great TOH Giveaway in record numbers, some still found time to write. Our starter home redo in August was a hit; we also drew astute cautions about invasive species mentioned in other articles. A new reader shared how tips from a recent tutorial are helping her update her B-and-B. And a couple showed off their folky garden-shed door handles.

Small-house style

I have to concur on the fantastic article "Making a Starter Home Smarter" [August, page 76]. I wish more homeowners would realize that a 600-square-foot home need not be devoid of style, storage, and great looks. Some "ugly ducklings" is a worthwhile effort. Right?

—DAVE SOUS, WINDHOLM, VA

Invasive fauna and flora

In "All About Frogs" [August, page 81] you stated that box turtles "are not common in the north in Maine." Better not try it! Chasing or keeping box is illegal in Maine. It is an invasive species that, if released into rivers and lakes, threatens native freshwater fish. Best to check with your local extension service or pond society before you purchase on your water feature.

—JILL BLACKWOOD
SOUTH PORTLAND, MAINE

I was disappointed to see an article advising the planting of Japanese barberry ("Flowers for Late-Summer Color,"



August, page 39). This known invader is quite a problem. Homeowners should do research to plan gardens that fit with local habitats.

—CHRISTINE RECHOW, W.VA.

The editors reply: Thanks, Jill and Cindy, for raising excellent points. To our alternatives to invasive plants, go to theoldfarmersalmanac.com!

Easier wallpaper stripping

I'm a new subscriber to your magazine and a lucky new Ditty and B-and-B owner. In a recent issue your expert detailed how to remove

wallpaper [March, page 39, or go to theoldfarmersalmanac.com]. What a blessing to come across that Pro-sanity, with only those advice from several DIY websites and product instructions, I'd found the process tedious and difficult. However, armed with my new knowledge from your how-to, I tackled a giant bulk, and the wallpaper came off so easily! Thanks for being a standout resource. Your experts and tips set your show, website, and magazine apart from all others!

—KAREN BRANTON

THE UNPAINTABLE ROOM, PORTLAND, ME

reader
project
of the
month



Garden-tool door pulls

800-ME-OWN-BUILDING.COM/PORTLAND.COM

In May's Home Solutions [page 24], we were so inspired by your not-so-ordinary garden tool-door pulls that we just had to "borrow" the idea. When we couldn't locate an old shovel and pitchfork, we bought new ones, spray-painted the green handles black, and used leftover stoneware to seal the wood. The result was our perfect reproduction of your outstanding idea!

how to
recreate
it

The editors
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checklist {October 2011}

EASY WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR HOME RIGHT NOW

Replace detectors

Observe Fire Prevention Week (October 9–15) by doing more than just changing the battery in your detectors. Experts agree that you should not keep smoke alarms beyond 10 years, and most carbon-monoxide detectors last only about five years. Time for replacements? Check the date that's stamped on the back of each alarm to know if it has expired.



Plant bulbs now for future blooms

Spring-flowering bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths, should be planted before the first fall frost to allow enough time for roots to form. At the nursery, look for the biggest bulbs of your chosen variety—they'll give you the largest blooms. Dig holes two to three times deeper than the bulbs are tall, once you've placed them in the ground. Top them with a layer of leaves for insulation. Come March you'll be glad your green thumb braved the chill.



Plant bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths, now.

TOH TIP

Repaint your front door's threshold

Few things take a beating like the threshold of your main entry. Revive it by sanding the wood with 80-grit sandpaper, then 150-grit, to remove old paint or varnish and any splinters. Finish by smoothing the surface with 220-grit paper and recoating with a weather-resistant deck paint or gray varnish.

Seal your garage

As you winterize your home, don't forget your garage door. Inspect any weatherstripping; check along the bottom for air gaps, and replace old, brittle seals there and along the door frame's sides with new vinyl or rubber seals. While you're at it, lubricate the door's moving parts, including all hinges and rollers, with WD-40.



What's on your checklist?

1. If the hanging timber posted plans that were "weathering" outside look indoors so they don't freeze.

Marnie Lesley,
Pittsburgh

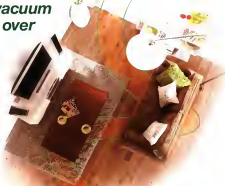
6 months your view at checklist@thehouse.com



Oust spiders

As the weather grows cool and damp, these eight-legged creatures start seeking shelter indoors. Though most common house arachnids are disease-carrying vectors and are harmless, some—like the sac spider, which gives painful bites—emit scary hissing sounds. To eliminate them, use a vacuum cleaner with a hose extension to suck up webs and sacs from behind furniture and in corners. Cardboard boxes are a common hiding spot, so upgrade your storage bins—and let the invasion of the creepy-crawlers ruin the stuff of Halloween tales.

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home solutions

Edited by Jessica Drake & Peter

inside

10 USES

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▶ SMART IDEA

Bone-chilling Halloween entry

What better way to welcome your neighborhood's scariest witches, ghouls, and goblins to your home than by tricking out your front door. For this spooky setup, we turned bones (fake, of course) into a knocker, a replica skull into a light fixture, and a plain door rectangle into a deadly clever doormat. To do it yourself, you'll need your own faux bones. But forgo plastic; instead, look to anatomical-model companies for life-like casts made from polycarbonate or resin. Then put them yourself with a drill/drive, some screws, and a can of black spray paint—and prepare to see some very surprised faces approach your walkway on Halloween.

▶ Turn the page to find out how to make the knocker doorman and skull light



www.iamanant.com



4 SMART IDEA DOWNLOADED

How-to: Bone knocker

1 Assemble the bones. For the knocker, you'll need two rubber vertebrae and a rib (35 each and \$20, respectively, from www.com). Place the smaller end of the ribs between the two vertebrae as shown. Hiding the arrangement securely, carefully drill a pilot hole (it should go through each vertebra and into the ribs) in each side.

2 Pin the bones together. Drive a stainless steel wire head screw through the pilot holes as you just made. You may need to tighten or loosen the screw slightly to accommodate inconsistencies in the angle shape or curve of the bones.

3 Mount the knocker to a block. Cut a mounting plate from scrap wood—we used a 3/4" board—to fit discreetly under the top of the knocker, but you can use and shape the block any way you like. Place it the side of your front door so that it disappears from view. Then, working from the underside of the block, drive a 3/4" x 1/2" dry-fit screw through the wood and into the back of each vertebra. Affix to your door with removable mounting tape that you can easily peel off at the end of the season.



Stencil the skeleton-foot doormat

Step up your stoop superstitiously with this inventive doormat. All you need is a can of indoor/outdoor matte-black spray paint, a plain over mat (\$2.3 for an 18-by-30 inch mat, costco.com), and our downloadable stencil template, available at thishouse.com/2011.

STEP 1 ▶ Trace the stencil template, using a photocopy or enlarge it as needed.

STEP 2 ▶ Trace the design onto stencil film with a fine-tip permanent marker, then go over the outlines you just drew with a stencil knife or electric stencil cutting gun.

STEP 3 ▶ Lay the stencil over your mat, securing the edges with painter's or masking tape to prevent shifting. Apply three or four coats of spray paint until opaque.

STEP 4 ▶ Remove the stencil, and place by your front door to get trick-or-treaters off on the right foot.



Make the skull light

Head in the light! Cut out a skull-shaped light fixture from a stack of pumpkins—and you can ensure it is at least 100% more than it takes to tell a candy bowl. First, invite ease to choose a skull with large holes in the eye-sockets, missing teeth, or other spaces that will emit light. We got ours from the Applehead Chen Company (524-applehead.com). Then simply set a battery-powered LED tea light behind the jaw and turn on at dusk for a ghostly glow. —J.P.



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40 THIRTY FINDS

Save on home decor

Buying the five pieces shown here at a typical house furnishings store could cost you almost \$1,500—but this cozy setup rings in at less than half that. The trick: The products are all from one and the same retailer. Many of these shops offer significant savings over their grown-up counterparts but stock items that look just as sophisticated. Need proof? Read on. —JANELL BURNETT

Pillows Known for its stylish patterns, Dwell Studio comes a lot of love with adult appeal—and most cushions, like this geometric one, cost less than \$40. dwellstudio.com

Curtains These brushed-cotton panels, along with Restoration Hardware Baby & Child's more drapery collection, deliver the classic look of an upscale company for a lot less without sleeping on quality or size. rhwbabyandchild.com

Lighting Go to Pottery Barn Kids for vintage-style lamps, such as this refined fixture, which has a turned base inspired by antique candlesticks. potterybarnkids.com

Storage Among the berry of playful options at Land of Nod (Crate & Barrel's children's emporium), these roomy wire bookshelves steal our hearts. landofnod.com

Upcycled seating Trendy teen-chic Urban Outfitters offers beanbaggers that are as old as the hills: Acrylic-polyester—but at a fraction of the price. Stick to the furniture section, which includes this dapper chair as a class. urbanoutfitters.com



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Ladder safety basics

The last thing you want to be thinking about when you're standing on a ladder is falling off it. Here, six tips for staying steady



Whether you're installing crown molding or hanging holiday decorations from your roof, your ladder is only as safe as you make it. Think balancing two stools above the ground is no big deal? Tell that to the nearly 247,000 people who died in the U.S. last year because of ladder-related injuries — that's more than were hurt by any other piece of DIY equipment. To help you avoid spills, TOH general contractor Tom Sisk weighs in on the dos and don'ts of ladder use.

—NATALIE SINGERICH MACHIONE

1. Choose your ladder wisely. Opt for fiberglass if there's any chance you'll be working with wiring or near power lines, since metal and dirty or waterlogged wood can conduct electricity, says Tom. And don't underestimate the maximum load capacity you need: Even if you weigh 150 pounds, carrying three 4x4s will put you over a 225-pound limit. A duty rating of 1, 1A, or 1AA (250, 300, or 375 pounds, respectively) should do the trick for most home projects.

2. Get the right height. Standing on the top rungs or overreaching can be a fast track to a fall, says Tom. Stay off the top two rungs of a step ladder, and the top three of an extension ladder. If you're deciding between two ladder heights, opt for the taller one to give yourself some leeway.

3. Keep your hands free. Use a tool belt or rope to haul equipment up and down the ladders. To avoid tripping as you climb, "hold on

with both hands, and pay attention to where the top section of the ladder meets the lower section," says Tom.

4. Angle it right. Put the base of a ladder too close to a building and you could tip over, too far away and it could slip out from under you. Follow the 4-to-1 rule: For every 4 feet of ladder height, the base should be 1 foot from the wall.

5. Check locks. Ensure that extension-ladder rung locks are secure and the fly section (the top portion) is shut on from the base (the lower section) before climbing. For step ladders, fully extend the rail spreaders.

6. Never climb on shaky ground. "If the ground at the ladder's base is uneven, make a level by digging out dirt and standing the legs on a wide plank," says Tom. "Make sure the ladder is firmly secured—it should be rock or wobble." And never use a ladder on icy ground.

Invest in these upgrades

A good ladder has small investments. Increase the functionality of yours—and make it safer—with these worthy add-ons.



For cleaning gutters on windows

Try Ladder Max Stand-off Gutterator (\$125; amazon.com). What it does: Stand arms hold the ladder away from your work surface for water maneuvering and a wider base of support.



For scissor grips

Try Louisville Ladder Luvex (\$25; hardwarestore.com). What it does: The attachment extends a ladder's leg to keep the entire thing level and stable, even on steps.



For easily damaged walls

Try LadderNet (\$25; ladderexp.com). What it does: A wide rubber band straps around the head of any ladder, preventing damage to walls while maintaining clearance.

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Smart savings, ample charm

More well-priced upsticks and less paint, a dated look, space, countertop and lots more function. By DEBBIE HALLIDAY • Photos by MARK LOHMAN



before Workroom's pink and white laminate, such as country tile ceiling, dated kitchen offer a dramatic vinyl tile checkerboard floor, blue paint, and vintage-style details add personality, vintage open shelving adds subtle charm.

Try renovating on a budget and we if you don't own a bet here and a bet there until the best details are gone. Unless, of course, you're a pro like Melissa Dodson, who would rather sacrifice a couple of big ticket items than a half-dozen small ones. The veteran designer compared this kitchen for friends Chris and Tyla Webb, in El Dorado, Arkansas. "It was the least-expensive project I've ever done," she says, "yet it's one of my favorites." With the couple eager to shave costs while gaining function, style, and a home office, Dodson rejected a pricey apron sink, granite, and stainless steel for a drop-in basin, laminate, and basic white worktop appliances. Modeling gives the room a finished look—and hides signs of a former dropped ceiling. She replaced those cabinets with gridded drawer space but kept the upper, simply adding new doors and hardware. Then, speaking of details, she painted the exposed beams. "It's all homey you when find the hinges painted," she notes. Splurges included custom built-in, a storage-picked island, and a vintage-style wrought pendant over the sink, right where everyone can see it. The lesson, says Dodson: "For your money where it counts."



before

A partition wall split the 360-square-foot bare-bones space and a dropped ceiling made it feel even smaller.



after

Removing the wall opened up the room and allowed for more storage and workspace within the original footprint.

1. Chose white appliances that blend seamlessly into white cabinets.

2. Added cupboard and counter space over the dining room as a staging area for meals.



3. Demolished the partition wall to make way for an island with drawers, storage cupboards, recycling bin pullout, and a butcher block top.

4. Built in an office area with a desk behind cabinet doors and storage for files and art supplies.

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before+after: kitchens

the key details

• This spice drawer uses the ingenious angled divider to make loading the containers an easy job. *Dividers: L&L Design; this pull and pins: Interio; Van Dyke & Associates*



• An L-shaped built-in keeps the computer hidden and art supplies well organized and easy to grab. That was, homeowner Tina Webb and daughter Sarah always know where to find the scanner. *L*



homeowner tip
TINA WEBB
ELIZABETH, ARIZ.

“Track your budget by paying your contractor on a weekly schedule. If you need to adjust, you can think about switching to lower-cost appliances and finishes.”



• A beveled edge draws up simple black laminate countertops. Tiny slots into “pencil space” between two cabinets to near the sink. *Painted: Reichenbach Hardware; Countertops: Millstone*

low-cost counters
Look for a new
improved
laminate texture
at ShelbyHou.com/No2022



• Open shelves help top many make-overs of the island, which has sturdy butcher block top and furniture-like feet. *Paint: Sherwin Williams; Floor: Phoenix County; Butler: Bob; John: Bob; Vinyl: Bob; Mr. Kuroki*



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^{*}Individual results may vary

[†]Those who have had a drug or alcohol problem may be more likely to misuse Lyrica.

Prescription Lyrica is not for everyone. Tell your doctor right away about any serious allergic reactions that causes swelling of the face, mouth, lips, gums, tongue, throat or neck or any trouble breathing or that affects your skin. Lyrica may cause suicidal thoughts or actions in a very small number of people. Call your doctor right away if you have new or worsening depression, suicidal thoughts or actions, or unusual changes in mood or behavior. Lyrica may cause swelling of your hands, legs and feet. Some of the most common side effects of Lyrica are dizziness and sleepiness. Do not drive or work with machines until you know how Lyrica affects you. Other common side effects are blurry vision, weight gain, trouble concentrating, dry mouth, and feeling “high.” Also, tell your doctor right away about muscle pain along with feeling sick and feverish, or any changes in your eyesight including blurry vision or any side effects if you have diabetes. You may have a higher chance of swelling, blisters or pinching weight if you are also taking certain diabetes or high blood pressure medicines. Do not drink alcohol while taking Lyrica. You may have more dizziness and sleepiness if you take Lyrica with alcohol, narcotic pain medicines, or medicines for anxiety. If you have had a drug or alcohol problem, you may be more likely to misuse Lyrica. Tell your doctor if you are planning to father a child. Talk with your doctor before you stop taking Lyrica or any other prescription medication.

Please see Important Risk Information for Lyrica on the following page

To learn more visit www.lyrica.com or call toll-free 1-888-9 LYRICA (1-888-959-7422).

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA.

Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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IMPORTANT FACTS



(LEER-Hah)

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT LYRICA

LYRICA may cause serious, even life-threatening, allergic reactions (such as hives, LYRICA, and call your doctor right away if you have any signs of a serious allergic reaction:

- Bleeding at your face, mouth, lips, gums, tongue, throat or neck
- Have any trouble breathing
- Swelling of your face (swollen cheeks) or blisters

Like other antiepileptic drugs, LYRICA may cause suicidal thoughts or actions in a very small number of people (about 1 in 500). Call your doctor right away if you have any symptoms, especially if they are new, worse or worry you, including:

- New or worsening depression
- Suicidal thoughts or actions
- Unusual changes in mood or behavior

Do not stop LYRICA without first talking with your doctor. LYRICA may cause swelling of your hands, legs and feet. This swelling can be a serious problem in people with heart problems.

LYRICA may cause dizziness or sleepiness. Do not drive a car, work with machinery, or do other dangerous things until you know how LYRICA affects you. Ask your doctor when it is okay to do these things.

ABOUT LYRICA

LYRICA is a prescription medicine used in adults 18 years and older to treat:

- Pain from damaged nerves that happens with diabetes or that follows looking of shingles
- Partial seizures when taken together with other seizure medicines
- Phenytoin (phenytoin) over your body

Who should NOT take LYRICA:

- Anyone who is allergic to anything in LYRICA

BEFORE STARTING LYRICA

Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions, including if you:

- Have had depression, mood problems or suicidal thoughts or behavior
- Have or had kidney problems or dialysis
- Have heart problems, including heart failure
- Have a bleeding problem or a low blood platelet count
- Have alcohol problems, drink drugs or alcohol at the past
- Have ever had swelling of your face, mouth, tongue, lips, gums, neck, or throat (angioedema)
- Plan to father a child. It is not known if problems seen in animal studies can happen in humans

Are pregnant, plan to become pregnant or are breastfeeding. It is not known if LYRICA will harm your unborn baby. You and your doctor should decide whether you should take LYRICA or breast-feed, but not both.

Tell your doctor about all your medicines. Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. LYRICA and other medicines may affect each other causing side effects. Especially tell your doctor if you take:

- Aspirin or other medicines containing aspirin (ACLS) inhibitors. You may have a higher chance for bleeding and fever

BEFORE STARTING LYRICA, continued

- Any other medicines (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen) for arthritis
- Any other medicines (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen) for arthritis
- Any other medicines (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen) for arthritis
- Any other medicines (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen) for arthritis
- Any other medicines (such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen) for arthritis

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LYRICA

LYRICA may cause serious side effects, including:

- See "Important Safety Information About LYRICA"
- Mouth problems, pain, sores or weakness along with itching, red and fever
- Eye problems including blurry vision
- Weight gain. Weight gain may affect control of diabetes and can be serious for people with heart problems
- Floating "bugs"

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor right away. The most common side effects of LYRICA are:

- Dizziness
- Trouble concentrating
- Blurred vision
- Swelling of hands and feet
- Weight gain
- Dry mouth
- Sleepiness

If you have diabetes, you should pay extra attention to your skin while taking LYRICA and tell your doctor of any sores or skin problems.

HOW TO TAKE LYRICA

Do:

- Take LYRICA exactly as your doctor tells you. Your doctor will tell you how much to take and when to take it.
- Take LYRICA at the same times each day.
- Take LYRICA with or without food.

Don't:

- Drive a car or use machinery if you feel dizzy or sleepy while taking LYRICA.
- Drink alcohol or use other medicines that make you sleepy while taking LYRICA.
- Change the dose or stop LYRICA suddenly. You may have headaches, nausea, dizziness, or trouble sleeping if you stop taking LYRICA suddenly.
- Start any new medicines without first talking to your doctor.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

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Go to www.lyrica.com or call 1-866-699-7422 (3-666-4LYRICA).

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uponor

before + after:
bath

From dated to sophisticated

This couple did it themselves, with an eye toward classic details and a leg up from her dad

By DEBORAH DALLON - Photographer KEVIN KURTZ

Living: meet door to the in-laws has moved. When Kevin and Jennifer Johnson, owners of a 1937 four-square in right-left, family-owned Lowellville, Ohio, redid their only bath, Kevin looked for help from neighbor Bob Coppola—aka Jennifer's dad—and a network of local suppliers and advisors. From an aunt, who, coincidentally, lived in the house 60 years ago, they learned that the space once held a kitchenette. That explained its generous footprint, but not, as two-foot-wide Kevin puts it, having to "hodge my knuckles on a lowered ceiling while showering in what felt like a cage." He and Bob took the room down to its walls, replaced pipes and wiring, popped in a new vanity, tub, toilet, and accents, and crafted new casings. They finished with paint conceived by Bob, a retired painting contractor. A plumber friend provided know-how, and the only paid help was the tile installer. Says Kevin, "I like that we did it ourselves—and everything works."

before The vinyl floor and tub surround were worn, and the single sink meant long waits. **after** New tile and a marble-flecked double vanity give the bath a classic look and more function



Twice these light sconces and a ceiling mount fixture give extra ambient light

before + after: bath

• the key details

4 **Mirrored sides** help the wall hung medicine chests almost disappear putting the emphasis on the oversize oval mirror instead. Medicine cabinet: *Zenith Source, Hamptonbury*



4 **Black and white tile** gives the area where the house was built. Feet extensions made from bricks level the vanity on the uneven floor. *The Delta*



homeowner tip

even jessica lowell, lll, cpa
"When shopping for a vanity pay attention to details. Curs was a great price, but its prefabricated holes and drop-in sinks made finding the right faucets a challenge."



4 **Smoke-colored grout**, a row of subway tiles on end and bordered with black trim plus recessed granite shelf add character and function to the tub shower. *Shower curtain: Target*

4 **Chrome finishes** under the fittings, hardware and bath accessories. Faucet installed by: *Proper Faucets Handy Service*



21 **budget baths**
Find more inspiring remodels at hgtv.com/budgetbaths

• before + after

The future lockers stayed the same, as the owners got two from handy family members. That saved the biggest single expense in this \$5,000 gut redo: the tilework.

1 **Replaced the toilet** with one that has period styling and added a seat. *Cost: \$1,200*

2 **Pulled out the cast-iron tub** and removed the lowered ceiling over the tub/shower. The new bathtub is easy to install fiberglass



3 **Evened up the vanity wall**, which previously had a railroad bumpout

4 **Swapped the one-sink vanity** for a more functional two-sink version for the family and new and updated it with chrome knobs

Sometimes your hands
could use a hand.



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paint
ideas

Let the flecks fly

VisualizeJH.com's new paint and color ideas, but with a twist: you can make your own.

By EDD HAGEMAN Photographs by WENDEL T. WENDEL

Spattering mud on something your kid could do, but that shouldn't ruin its impact? Spattering is an easy way to receive a big piece of fun reuse and give it a custom touch, says decorator, painter, and TV icon.

This child's desk serves as our inspiration, so let's first ground and paint the work table in a solid finish. If you're working with a painted piece, you can go directly to spatter.

Just mix equal parts water latex—choose a color that contrasts with the base color—and clear acrylic glaze, which gives the speckles shine, and a few more. Then lightly load a spatter brush, and tap it against a work board 6 inches above the surface to create a head of paint flecks. Do one surface at a time, letting it dry before turning the piece and spattering again.

To pass a few hours, watch that behavior piece take on a whimsical and original new look. ■

Pattern maker

Using a spray bottle, mix equal parts of water and paint, and spray the paint onto a surface. Then, using a brush, create a pattern of paint flecks. The result is a custom, colorful, and fun piece of art.



↑ Move closer to the surface for densely packed speckles, and farther away to create a more subtle effect.

PAINT Behr's Red Hot base coat and Snow Fall glaze coat

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Our favorite period-style buys

We found 15 classic details for your home that won't break the bank.

By DANIELLE TILBESCHKE • Photographs by MARK WOOD

Save time—something to be used for splashing on marble mosaic tile or a handblown sconce shade. But adding a vintage look doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. To prove the point, we turned to our favorite big-box retailers, online magazines, and numerous* catalogs for low-cost look-alike and pretty reproduction fixtures and finishes. The result? The water-friendly sink box and on the following pages, from a pedestal sink full of flood charms to a perfect weathering that delivers a period look at no time.

\$160
Victorian-style
pedestal sink
SARCA/PRODUCTS
With its 19th-century style
faucet and elegant
backsplash, this
chrome-plated pedestal
is a perfect fit for
the smallest of baths.
victorian.com



\$31
coastal-style
oil-on-laminate
clock
The design and
weathered bronze
finish make this
feature a natural for
the walls of a porch.
But it would be
equally striking
inside. Bunking a
floyd mirror or even a
pewee nightstand?
turnkey.net



\$12-\$18
cubicle host register
ALLEN + RUTH
Inspired by 20th-century designs and given
an antique brass or brushed nickel look,
these clock covers slide up toward an inside
You could also use them with speaker labels
to help guests locate their rooms.



\$224
**shepherd's hook
 bridge faucet**
 AMERICAN FLY FLY

This solid brass, chrome-finished faucet captures the beauty of Victorian profiles, down to the porcelain cross handles. bathhouseinspired.com

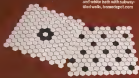


\$59
train-style rack
 DYNASTY FURNITURE
 Modeled after vintage hotel luggage racks, this double-decker storage shelf will hold four large towels or bath linens at the ready. Its polished chrome finish covers a steel alloy base. homewise.furniture.com

\$165
punched-tin chandelier
 KATIE'S LIGHT HOUSE
 Hang this hand-painted device "nude" (left), design for a rustic look, over a kitchen or dining table. It can be configured for electric or wax candles. countrylivingproducts.com



\$5
patterned hex tile
 MENDOTA TILE
 Use these unglazed porcelain mosaics in a flower or dot pattern in the ground in a black-and-white bath with subway-tiled walls. bathroomreport.com



\$5 each
glass cabinet knobs
 WORLD MARKET
 Reflects a dresser or built-in with these jewel-like clear or colored glass pulls that have been debossed with an embossed flower, leaf, or bird design. worldmarket.com for stores.



\$24 each
scrollwork brackets
 ANTIQUELOFT.COM
 Larger versions of these once-held-up-wall-mount sticks. Use the scaled-down painted-brass brackets shown here to support a shelf for books or pottery pieces. antiqueloft.com



\$48
rug
 THE HOME DEPOT
 This paper-pulp rug, painted & printed, has a swirling large-scale floral motif popular in the 18th century. Look for it again. Try this multi-fiber runner over paper in a foyer, dining room, or study. A special backing cuts the time needed to hang it. handstrington.com or gardenofeatin.com

\$7
oil-rubbed bronze pendant
 MILLERIEUX LIGHTING
 Get tiered lighting with an early 20th-century look. Hang this chrome-finished steel fixture over a kitchen sink or as a group of three over an island. bathhouseinspired.com



\$249
faux-panel watermark ink
 ETC. THE WORKS
 Transforms dry-walled dining or living room in hours with primer, pre-cut medium-density fiberboard plates, and walls, and paper cap and stone molding. Use the built "panels" and frames with acrylic latex paint. etctheworks.com

\$3 each
colonial house number
 ADORN MANSION LIVING CO.
 Painted a brick-front Colonial or a clay-veneer-sided cottage with large trees, black birds fly in that scene. bathhouseinspired.com





Build a bat house

Give these mosquito-eating creatures a place to roost in time for trick-or-treat season, and reap the benefits year-round.

Photography by MICHAEL T. WIZARD • Illustrations by MARGO TOSCO



↑
A bat house should be hung high on a post or facade or affixed to a tall pole.



Cost: \$50

Time: 4 hours

Difficulty: Easy to moderate
Cutting the bat shape requires a steady hand, but the house's assembly is simple.

What kids don't love spooky stuff and Halloween? Build a bat house with them, and they'll get the thrill of seeing those critters up close, along with an ecology lesson. The North American bat can devour more than 600 mosquitoes an hour and snack on worms, moths, and beetles, keeping your yard pest-free naturally.

You can finish this project in an afternoon. Our design is made from 1x4 lumber and plywood, with netting for the bats to hang on and a business-inspired facade with a small air gap to allow for ventilation. For safety's sake, leave saw cuts and drilling to the grown-ups, let the kids help measure, paint, and caulk the pieces. Bats like warmth, so when you're finished, hang the house in a sunny spot, and watch them as they dart in and out during their twilight noontime.

WHOEVER SAID
"DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF"
DOESN'T WORK HERE



THE NEW 2011 JOURNEY

HOW IT'S DONE

Build it

The little abode is only about 14 inch deep, but it can accommodate dozens of winged guests, as bats prefer a snug spot to nest together. The interior is painted black to keep it dark and warm, just the way they like it.





8. **Make the top and side pieces.** Cut three lengths from 1x2 lumber one that's 24 inches long and two that are 19 inches long. You'll sandwich these pieces between the front and back panels to create a light space where the bats will roost.



9. **Attach the netting.** Lay deer netting on the inside of the back panel. Staple it to the inner edge of the top 1x2 and along the panel's sides. Wrap the netting around the bottom, pull it taut, and staple it to the back. Cut off any excess netting.



9. **Attach the front panel.** Apply caulk to the face of the 1x2s where the front panel will go. Place the front panel onto them, with the top edges aligned and the bat shape facing downward. Drive deck screws, spaced 6 inches apart, through the panel and into the 1x2s.



10. **Add the bat shape.** Apply caulk to the exposed lower sections of the 1x2s. Lay the bat shape onto them, below the front panel, leaving a 1/2-inch gap between the two pieces for ventilation. Clamp the shape in place, and drive one deck screw through each side.

6. **Attach the top end sides.** Apply caulk to the face of the long 1x2. Lay it flush with the top of the 24-by-26-inch back panel, and clamp it in place. Drive 3-inch deck screws, spaced 6 inches apart, through the 1x2 and into the panel. Apply caulk to the tops and faces of the two short 1x2s. Lay them flush with the sides of the panel, butted against the long 1x2. Screw them to the back panel in the same manner as the long 1x2.

7. **Paint the parts.** Coat the inside surfaces of the panels and the bat shape with black paint. For the back panel, paint only from the top edge to the ends of the 2x2 sides. Then paint the outside surfaces in a color that will help keep the exterior warm but not stifling. (In the North, opt for a dark color to absorb heat; in the South, a light, heat-reflecting color may be better choice.) Let the paint dry completely.

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DODGE

Stylish salvage kitchen

Vintage treasures enjoy a second life in this charming eat-in and prep area. Here's how to approximate the look in your home. BY JESSICA COCCIA, FICHER • PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SCHMANN

To keep a modern-day kitchen from appearing too cookie-cutter, it can pay to look to the past. "Antiques offer such one-of-a-kind beauty," says Eli O'Neill, who wrote *Rustic Farm Style* (Coco Books) and helped design the space shown here. Anchored by a stick island customized with vintage corbels, the room features almost entirely second-hand (or third- or fourth-hand) finds, from the fascinating pine dish cabinet to the painted breakfast stools. A soft palette of white, cream, and gold brings out the faded patina of these furnishings—and ties in the few new pieces, including bronze cabinet hardware and a home-center pendant lamp. Read on for more ways to mix off-the-shelf with salvage. ■

Victorian-style towel bar

Keep dishcloths handy by mounting this simple rod on the side of an island. \$25, betterhomedesign.com. Printed curtains with \$6.99 for four, homegoods.com for stores.



cup pull

Lend drawers old-school appeal with classic zinc hardware custom with painted metal leaves. \$14.95, rockler.com.



vintage stool

This former milking perch boasts a handsome painted patina. Spice up your kitchen's seating with similar models, found at online auctions. From about \$20, green-ey.com.



slim pendant

Replacing the bulk of the room's other overhead fixtures, this simple lamp pulls a couple shades up in class. Lighting: \$129, shadesoflight.com.



painted bracket

Take a page from the farmhouse and create a custom shelf by lagging a pair of ornate cast-iron supports with a painted board. \$17, homebr.



crystal chandelier

Mimic the look of the farmhouse's 120-year-old fixture for a fraction of the cost with this equally glamorous fixture. \$349, homeaccents.com.



glass-door cabinet

With two doors and three shelves, this rustic-styled hutch provides practical storage while letting you put treasured dishware on display. \$260, target.com.



decorative corbel

Give a standard island shelf a rustic feel by installing one of these swirled-wood carvings on either side. \$170, vandyke.com.

salvaged sink

A utility sink and backspout in one, this gently used earthenware workhorse is a budget-friendly alternative to buying new. \$300, norwell.com.



tumbled marble countertop

Rustic to see the lines, this delivers unexpected heft to pale wood—and sets things right to stand up to daily food prep. \$37.99 per square foot, kens.com.



The stunning silence of German engineering.

Bosch engineering has raised the stakes by lowering the volume with its new high-performance dishwashers—the quietest line sold in the U.S.*



Silence is a Bosch virtue. That's why the new line of Bosch dishwashers is engineered to be the quietest in the U.S.* Starting with a solid molded base, Bosch engineers added three layers of sound-dampening insulation and a suspension motor, measures that effectively eliminate noise caused by mechanical vibrations. That in turn makes some units up to 300 percent quieter than comparable models. At Bosch, we believe in engineering quiet, and in the sweet sounds of silence. www.bosch-home.com/us



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*Average sound power level in dB(A) at 1 m, as measured with the dishwasher running on the normal cycle.

Honeycomb shades

With these draft-blockers, it's a breeze to cozy up your hive. Two twists on the classic now promise better-than-ever energy savings. By DEBORAH SALOWICH • Photographs by MARK WEDDER

Introduced in the 1990s, honeycombs are built on a simple concept: Trapped air is an insulator that can conserve your hard-earned heat. Since then, makers have scrambled to make honeycombs work even better. Consider these two blackout versions. The budget one has double cells and side tracks to top drafts, while the high-end one has an extra air pocket to hold its heat. Because there's no convoluted energy-efficiency test for shades—at least not yet—they can't be ranked, but both high performers qualify for a 20% federal energy tax credit when installed inside a double-glazed window. Lowering energy will raise your comfort level, so look for differences in style, function, and price. ■

High-End

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Dimensions: 24" by 48" • Warranty: Lifetime for buyer

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\$161**

ComforTrack Plus

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Dimensions: 24" by 48" • Warranty: Lifetime for buyer

Budget

IS IT FOR YOU?

If you can't afford the fabric shades, take to the big screen, and work a simpler installation.

IS IT FOR YOU?

If you want to contribute air and light leaks, are worried about cording online, and are handy.

how it's made

A U.S. factory makes cells within inches from a composite polyester (provides most mechanical properties). Cells, that mean of a fabric that and a paper fabric. Top of window shade is finished with a fabric panel.

mounting & care

Shades mounted inside the window frame with a fabric-covered aluminum head rail. Shades can be lightly dusted or vacuumed, and spot cleaned with soap water.

energy savings

Because of the composite polyester, a higher end polyester (provides most mechanical properties). Cells, that mean of a fabric that and a paper fabric. Top of window shade is finished with a fabric panel.

how it's made

At a U.S. plant, paper like monomer polyester with a metallic film backing is formed into a double cell. Shades are slightly thicker and has plastic side tracks. Plastic stays at top and bottom. Continuous honeycomb shades for home.

mounting & care

Double-glazed windows hold the shades. Double-glazed shades with double side tracks hold by magnets and self-adhesive foam tape. Tracks release for window cleaning. Gentle vacuuming, spot cleaned or soaked in warm water.

energy savings

Two air pockets and metallic film help insulate. Side tracks are "flex easy" to make a snug fit, making this kind of honeycomb shade the best.



*Average price in store
**Manufacturer's suggested retail price

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The modern homesteader's kitchen

At the TOH TV house, traditional food storage and prep areas will be paired with modern amenities for a space that streamlines cooking from scratch

By KATHY FARRUKIT • Photography: BOBICA PRATO

For many homeowners, a gleaming pro-grade kitchen is the Holy Grail of home improvement, even if all the sizzle it gets is relaxing last night's dinner. But for Joe and Becky Telford, the owners of the current *The Old House* TV project house, in Bedford, Massachusetts, such a showpiece would be a waste of time and money. "We grow vegetables and herbs, we cook most of our meals at home, we freeze foods in bulk, and we compost food waste," explains Becky. "The last thing we need is a kitchen that looks good but doesn't function well."

In short, when it comes to cooking, the Telfords are following in the footsteps of their grandparents' generation. So it's not surprising that their planned kitchen has features, such as a separate pantry, that were common in houses of yore. But with help from kitchen designer Karly Marshall, the energetic young family is developing a space that works just as hard as they do, one that combines old-fashioned storage and prep areas with modern amenities for cooking from scratch.



Modern function, farmhouse flair (A) A six-burner range top will house both all-night simmering stews and searing steaks from farm-raised livestock. (B) The Telfords love to bake handmade pizza, so double convection ovens will give them space to fire up two at a time. (C) A pet rack keeps cookware within reach and keeps the space a veritable riot. (D) This granite-topped cabinet will act as a landing spot for garden-fresh produce and groceries. (E) The island's turned furniture-style legs have a traditional air that matches well with wood beams and exposed ceiling rafters.





Multitasking island

(A) A traditional marble-tile island tops the work island. Marble stays cooler than the surrounding air, so it will keep your place cool and is the perfect consistency for rolling. (B) The generous farmhouse sink provides plenty of space for washing produce. (C) The island will be used to hold a large cutting board and will be used to hold a large pot. (D) Even the most die-hard home cook will use a microwave to heat up leftovers. Here, it will be tucked into a nook between the island and the wall. (E) Seals provide a comfortable spot for guests who want to pitch in with food prep or simply watch the cooking action.

A homesteader's kitchen (and pantry)



Joe and Becky's renovation makes perfect sense in light of recent trends. In the past few years, more Americans have been cooking at home out of economic necessity, the number of people who grow some of their own food and buy produce at farmers' markets has increased, and food shoppers have been saving by buying groceries in bulk. As we return to trends and habits for cooking and eating, kitchen design is changing too, albeit more slowly. "The American kitchen has come full circle," says Marshall. "Now that people are cooking at home more, and often with fresh, local ingredients, their kitchens should support those habits."

Other designers have noticed that old-school kitchen elements still sell these days. "I'm seeing a lot more demand for things like wood-burned storage drawers for vegetables, organic produce, and built-in bread boxes," says Cynthia Bennett, a designer based in South Pasadena, California. She has also noted a transition away from double sinks to large, farmhouse-style basins. "That might have something to do with the huge quantities of fresh vegetables people are bringing home. They seem more interested in fresh foods, whether for health, cost, or environmental reasons," she says.

In their makeover, the Tiltwos plan to incorporate many of the features Bennett mentioned. Among their wish-list items for Marshall was having

space for storing veggies from the two raised beds on their backyard, along with places to keep groceries and pantry staples. They also wanted a dedicated collection spot for food scraps for their compost heap.

But they'll also benefit from 21st-century conveniences that facilitate food prep and cooking. The pantry, for example, will have a deep freezer for storing home-cooked soups, stews, and sauces, as well as bulk purchases from the grocery store. A warming drawer can keep meals—like homemade pizza, a family favorite—at the right temperature until serving time. And, unlike our forebears, the Tiltwos can minimize food waste by using the deep freezer and a large refrigerator to keep and preserve fresh food at its peak. "Storing produce and other foods properly was much harder or even impossible in our grandparents' age," says Linda Barry, who co-owns a canner and organic farm in Wapakoneta, Ohio. "Today we have modern refrigeration and a host of products that help you do it more easily."

As they roll down a road decades from their new kitchen, Becky is even thinking of it as a sort of classroom for the couple's daughter. "I want her to see that we're growing onions in the backyard and that the onion skins are composted and put back into the garden to nourish the growth of even more vegetables," she says. Just the way our grandparents might have taught us. ■



A fully loaded pantry

(A) Two salvaged wood doors will be turned into shelves to close off the separate pantry. (B) The Tiltwos are considering the use of wood-burned storage drawers for vegetables, organic produce, and built-in bread boxes. (C) Open shelves in front of the window are the perfect spot for growing fresh herbs year-round. (D) Becky will stash homemade soups and stews in the deep freezer so that her family can enjoy them in the off-season.

Smarter storage

Here are some ways to keep fresh foods fresher in kitchen overhead cupboards.



For dry goods

Keep four quart beans and grains in 64-ounce mason jars for \$12 for sale: www.berns.com



Tidy up bread fresh

A cleaning roll-up and bin for bread storage in a kitchen cupboard. \$155 www.berns.com



For root veggies

The wooden potato baskets are in a kitchen cupboard. \$55 www.berns.com



Fresher-to-own storage

Glass four-quart BPA-free storage containers with airtight lids. \$12 for sale: www.berns.com



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home center project

Make a cabinet from a bookshelf and shutters

Get a custom look for less by dressing up stock pieces with trim, knobs, and furniture feet. BY JOSEPH STRAUSS Photography VICKI BELL T. NICHOL



Cost: \$150
Time: 3 hours
Difficulty: Easy The only tricky task is nailing the trim

A compact cabinet offers just enough storage to tuck away essentials in a family room, bathroom, or bedroom. But if you have a limited budget for this handy piece, you won't find many design options out there. So we turned to TDM general contractor Tom Siro for some DIY advice. He demonstrated how to crutch off the shelf from a ready-to-assemble bookcase to make a charming cabinet that's easy on the wallet. With a few finishing touches, like trim and brass feet, this piece will spill off any room you put it in, and it takes just a few hours to build. Read on to learn how.



For complete instructions, turn the page

HOW IT'S DONE

Build it

The shutters are mounted to the face of the bookcase. Choose a pair that is the same height as the bookcase, or add a header board to make up for the difference. The top and base are cut to the width of the bookcase, and extend past the front to cover the edges of the shutter doors and leave a reveal.



make this cabinet

Find it at bit.ly/ask-ask or
plans.houzz.com/ask-ask

1 Build the bookcase. Put together a ready-to-assemble bookcase using the included hardware, you can find one at any home store. Attach the backing, using the included nails, to keep the piece square. Set the shelves aside for Step 5.



5 Cut and secure the trim. Mill a 1/2-inch molding to wrap the front and side edges of the cabinet's top and base. Nail on the trim so that it is flush with the cabinet's top, and do the same for the base, reversing the profile.

2 Attach the top and base. Cut two boards from 1x shelving to the width of the bookcase and to its depth plus the thickness of the shutters, plus 1/4 inch for a reveal. Nail the boards to the top and bottom of the bookcase, flush with the back and sides.



6 Hang the shutter doors. Lay the shutters on the face of the cabinet. Screw two H-hinges to the outside edge of each door and to the sides of the cabinet, using the included fasteners.

3 Add the header. Cut a length of 2x3 to the width of the cabinet. Lay it on the face of the cabinet and butt it against the top. Nail through the header and into the sides of the cabinet.



7 Add the door catches. Attach the metal plates to the inside top corners of the doors. Nail a stop block to the back side of the header so that the two pieces form an L. Screw the catches to the block so that they make contact with the plates when the doors are closed.

4 Install the furniture feet. Screw the corner feet plates to the base of the cabinet about 1 1/2 inches from each corner. Screw the feet into the plates.



8 Install the knobs. Mark the knob positions on the inner sides of the doors. Drill holes and secure the knobs with the included screws. Put on the shelves. Rough up the piece with sandpaper, then coat it with a primer sealer, such as Kilz, followed by satin or semigloss paint. ■



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Livening up a bland box

An inviting walkway and an airy new porch bring fresh folkies and much-needed character. By DEE HAGEMAN • Illustration by EDWARD DORTAL



Before

"There's absolutely nothing like a hot day in the front," says Christine Mathen of the 60-year-old house she shares with her husband, Tom Ruffenberger, in Grand, Pennsylvania. "I've been totally nervous what to do about this."

For ideas, she turned to Mark Casper, an architect at Michael Hiller of Hiller Albert Design Group, in Milton, Pennsylvania. "I wanted to introduce some points of interest," Hiller says. Drawing from early 20th-century design details that wouldn't overpower the house, he added a front porch inspired with cottage-inspired architecture, glass columns, and a gabled roof supported by a Victorian-style iron. Wood replaced the old walkway brick path, and a wide light box door matched the windows. Construction and a window box add more charm. "It's just about giving a focus to the front of the building," Hiller sums up. The design team captured Christine's full attention. "Well, the house is just as nice as can be," she says. "It would definitely be fun to do the porch."



Finishing touches

A mix of architectural elements works together to dress up the simple facade.



paint

Soft yellow is chosen to complement the new porch. A mix of architectural elements works together to dress up the simple facade.

sconce

A clearly recognizable Victorian style is used to anchor the house's look on the early 20th-century period light fixture.

house numbers

When homeowners want to add a touch of personality to the design, Shuttercraft offers a mix of styles.

shutters

Wood and lattice window shutters will add a touch of personality to the design. Shuttercraft offers a mix of styles.

Want a photoshopped redo? Send snapshots to redo@thisoldhouse.com

Heating and Cooling Your Old House

The hard way, or...

Window air conditioning units are noisy, drafty and unsightly. And installing conventional air duct systems in old houses often requires carving up closets and walls at great expense and disruption.

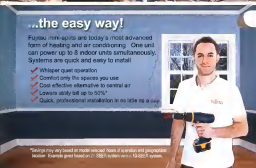
- ✓ Noisy window A/C keeps you from hearing the TV
- ✓ Lose valuable closet space to ductwork
- ✓ \$20,000 quote for central air gave you sticker shock
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*Savings may vary based on model, season, hours of operation and geographical location. Example given based on 27,000 BTU system versus 13,000 BTU system.

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DIY fall fix-ups

Leftover foliage? Winter problems or too many bugs? Grab some supplies and make a few fall fixes to get your home ready for the season. Things you can do on your own can save thousands on future repairs, maintenance and energy costs.

By LAURA JENSEN KASPER • Photos shown by JOE MARSHALL

1. Beef up insulation in an unfinished attic

Warning: Baby, it's cold outside—or it will be soon. "So pop your head up in the attic and check insulation levels," says Mike Rogers of Green Home America, which specializes in energy-efficient improvements. In addition to sealing gaps in the attic floor and framing, Rogers recommends topping insulation levels to R-49 or even as high as R-60 for most areas of the country. How to do it: If insulation is level with or below the ceiling joists, add loose fiberglass or cellulose over existing batts—using a manual blower. Make sure the material is well distributed, with no low spots. "Even a small gap greatly undermines performance," Rogers says. **THE PAYOFF:** Up to 10 percent savings on your utility bills.

2. Add storm windows

Warning: Old single-pane windows leak copious amounts of air, which makes for drafty drafts come winter. By installing double-track storms, you can dramatically reduce air infiltration and protect those lovely wrap-glass panes from the elements. How to do it: Measure carefully to determine whether you can use standard-size storms or need to custom order. When you're ready to install, position the unit in the window opening to check fit. Clean the window's exterior frame and trim. Apply a bead of caulk to the window's surrounding caulk, at the top and sides. Do not caulk the bottom of



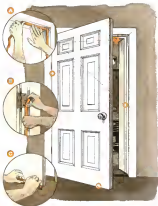
2

STORM WINDOW HOW-TO

- A • Caulk the storm's side and top flange, but not the bottom.
- B • Insert the unit inside the window frame.
- C • Secure the storm's flange to the house by driving screws around the unit's perimeter.
- D • Tap down the storm's exterior bar.

*When 70°F peaks in early winter, Tom's bills are half a size or less at \$140 a month from \$280.

the storm. However, needs to drain through the pre-drilled weep holes. Position the storm unit in the window frame, pushing up snug at the top, and secure with screws. Adjust the storm's flange on bottom exterior bar to rest on the sill. **THE PAYOFF:** Storms cost a fraction of replacement windows, \$60 to \$110 compared with \$300 to \$700, and yield energy savings of 15 percent (21 percent with low-e storms).



3

DOOR WEATHER-STRIPPING HOW-TO

A Apply peel-and-stick or nail-outstrips to the door edges, outside top and inside jamb.
B Use a peel-and-stick rubber strip for the hinge-side jamb.
C Secure a broom-drawstrip at the bottom of the door.

5 Button up interior doors to the basement and garage

WORK It's not just the front and back doors that you need to worry about. Cold air can also enter the house through gaps around any door leading to an unheated space, such as a garage or basement.

HOWTO DO IT Weatherstrip the top and sides, and add an inexpensive door sweep to the bottom. TGH general contractor Tim Sloss recommends a wood sweep that you can stain or paint to match your door and that has an attached nylon brush to follow the contours of irregular flooring or carpeting. Sweeps usually need to be cut to size, so be sure to measure the width of the door first. To install

the top-and-look-side jambs, use peel-and-stick high-density foam tape or nail-in vinyl gaskets. For the hinge-side jamb, a prepack adhesive-backed strip made of EPDM rubber will remain pliable after years of use. **THE PRICE** For \$20 and 30 minutes of your time, reduce cold air infiltration by as much as 33 percent.

4 Seal exhaust vents

WORK Exterior vents, particularly those for a clothes dryer or a whole-house fan, allow heated air to seep out of your house, while letting cold outside air in.

HOWTO DO IT Swap your dryer's louvers or install flapper-style vents for a Dwyer Vee-Seal (319-344) or door cone), which consists of an 11-inch

pipe topped with a plastic cap and handle. When the dryer is in use, the floating shuttle beneath the hood rises to let warm air, lint, and moisture escape. When not in use, the shuttle drops down to seal the hole and prevent drafts. For a whole-house fan, convert a simple box-shaped cover out of rigid foam insulation (use foil-type door tape for the seams) to enclose the fan during cold months, when it's not in use. From inside the house, fit the cover over the fan, and secure it to the frame with adhesive-backed Velcro strips. Just remember to remove the cover before you switch on the fan come spring. This kind of DIY cover can also help insulate a wall or window air conditioning unit that sits between your house and the outdoors.

THE PRICE Vent-to-seal can prevent 4 percent of your home's heated air from escaping.

5 Remove aggressive vines

WORK On brick or stone house facades, climbers with suckers, such as Virginia creeper, pull the lime out of the masonry, creating entry points for water. Vines also hold moisture against walls, which can wreak havoc on wood cladding, slowing their ability to dry out after a rain and causing rot. If vines get between boards, they can push them apart.

HOWTO DO IT "Pull all the vines off, working from the top down; cut them at the base, and dig out the roots," says TGH landscape contractor Roger Cook. To remove any traces left behind on wood siding, do a quick pass with an orbital sander. Come spring, paint as herbicide on any new growth.

REMARK You'll avoid having to spend up to \$25 per square foot for professional mortar repointing. For wood houses, dodge up to \$3,000 to re-side and rebuild a rotted-shingled roof.



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DIY projects

Slip is a new danger that's the same with it, and secure it with nails.
THE FIX-IT: Catching a leak before it happens can save you \$300 or more to repair a ceiling or wall and up to \$6,000 for mold remediation.

8 Patch cracks in the driveway

HOW TO DO IT: Small fissures and holes in asphalt can quickly expand into large gaps and potholes if snow and ice get into them.

HOW TO DO IT: Wait for a cold day, tar-like asphalt repair products work best when pliable. Clean out loose debris in the hole, and ensure the surface is dry. Using a caulk gun, inject a sealant (try Dupont 7906 Driveway & Repair Caulk, \$18 per four-pack) into the opening. Use a wood craft stick to tamp the sealant level.

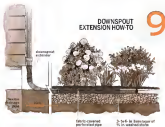
THE PAYOFF: Keeping on top of minor cracks can save you \$3 to \$8 per square foot to resurface the whole driveway.

9 Lengthen stubby downspouts

HOW TO: Heavy winter rain can

cause parking near your home's foundation if your downspout kinks are too short. That water can then infiltrate the foundation and be wicked up the side of the house, wreaking havoc along the way in the form of mold, insects, or rot, says Roger Cook. Telltale signs may be a wet spot in your basement after a rain or seeping cracks in the foundation.

HOW TO DO IT: Attach a flexible downspout extender that's connected to a length of drainage pipe buried just below grade; the pipe should direct water at least 10 feet away from your home's foundation. Rather than sending that diverted water into a dry well or losing it to the storm drain, put it to work by attaching another length of perforated pipe, wrapped in landscape fabric, that'll disperse the water to feed your flower beds. To allow for proper drainage, lay the perforated pipe on a 2- to 4-inch bed of washed stone.
THE PAYOFF: You've spent \$30,000 to \$300,000 to jack up the house and replace a rotted main beam, plus \$1,000 to \$3,000 to repair damaged joists. ■



1. Connect downspout to perforated pipe

2. Lay 2- to 4-inch fabric layer of 1/2-in. washed stone

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Day-to-day timeline

FRIDAY Outline the planter (Step 1)

SATURDAY Excavate and level the base (Steps 2-3)

SUNDAY Build the walls and fill the planters (Steps 4-6)



TOOLS
spade
stakes
string line and line level
shovel
hand trowel
steel rule
rubber mallet
2-foot level
rope
mason's line
brick hammer
caulk gun
sensors to mark the landscape fabric

MATERIALS
cap concrete blocks Choose frost-resistant for freestanding and retaining walls. Not walking pavers. To calculate how many blocks you need, divide the area (in inches) of each wall by the area of the largest block (16 in. x 20 in.) to get the number of blocks. Add 10 percent to cover cuts and breakage.
paver base A 60-pound bag covers 2 square feet at 3 inches deep.
leveling sand A 60-pound bag covers about 6 square feet at 1 inch deep.
drainage chips Get enough to fill your planters to three-quarters from the top.
masonry construction adhesive
landscape fabric
topsoil

Project photographer by KOLBY SMITH

1

1. Outline the planter

1. Know your blocks: Using blocks of various lengths allows for a natural-looking, randomized pattern. With only one textured face to work with, you'll need to leave certain blocks to get a second face that can be exposed—at corners or anywhere perpendicular walls meet. To do so, get a wide mason's chisel on the score line and strike it with a mallet to split the block. Clean off any jagged chunks with the claw of your brick hammer. Our blocks have tabs that can be knocked off to create the necessary wedge shape for corner walls.

2. Lay out the planter: Choose an end location for blocks and position them at the corner and your rough outline. Place blocks at varying sizes between them, leaving the sides parallel. Divide the interior area with two walls that create equal-size planters; every other course will overlap the main walls. Layout make sure you don't break walls with gaps between blocks. If so, you'll need to adjust your planter's width. Once the layout is complete, mark the outline with a spade.



2

2. Dig the base

1. Excavate the area: Starting at the low point of any slope, use a shoveling tool to excavate the loose topsoil—6 inches or so, depending on your locale.
2. Set level lines: Once the area is roughly excavated, set up string at least 10 inches and you can check your depth. Drive stakes near each corner and every 2 feet to define the space. Beginning at the uphill end, stretch the line between two stakes about 4 inches off the ground and level it using a line level. Instead of tying the line to your stakes, use a mallet to push it into the ground and level it while leveling the base. Work your way around the perimeter, level by level, then add additional lines stretching side to side to make the grid. Measure from the level line to the base of the excavated area. Dig or fill as necessary until the entire base is even and adjust it if it's not the best.

Tip: For the tamping stage ahead, consider renting a machine called a plate compactor, for about \$80 per day from your local tool rental center.



3

3. Lay the foundation

1. Add the paver base: To create a stable, well-draining base for the structure, lay 4 inches of paver base (1 1/2 inches divided in two) and divide into the excavated area.
2. Tamp and level the base: Using a tamper, compact the base. Check the distance from the base to the main lines frequently to keep the bed level. Add layers of paver base and tamp each one until your depth is equal to half that of one block, plus 1 inch of the ground level's lowest point.
3. Lay the leveling sand: To simplify fine-tuning the height of the blocks, add a 1-inch layer of leveling sand. Distribute it evenly with a strike rule. The bed should now be half the depth of one block at the ground level's lowest point.



watch how now
See us go to the location building this project at houzz.com/mch2008



install a lamp post

For a step-by-step guide to set and wire a lamp post, go to thisoldhouse.com/62223



4

4. Build up the walls

A. Lay the first course. Place the 1-ft block on the flat spot at the highest point of ground level. Use a rubber mallet to set the block in the sand. Use a level both outside to side, front to back, and corner to corner. Hold the next block against the first and drag it up close to avoid dragging the sand between blocks. Level and set the block, and place a level across both blocks to check them. Run your hand across the joint and use the level as a straightedge to make sure the tops of the blocks are flush. Set the remaining blocks in the same way, taking care to orient the textured faces outward along the perimeter. For the interior walls, the textured faces should be oriented toward the short end of the planter.

B. Block the corners. To create a dry, slatted look and give the structure strength, stagger the joints on each course. On every other course, lay beds of masonry corbels and fill in with a couple of 16-in. 2x4s. The interior walls look best period-style with a flapping 1-in. end block with the end walls. Keep building up until each tier is three courses from completion, including the cap layer.



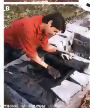
5

5. Fill the planters and cap the walls

A. Fill the planters. To keep the planters from holding water—and freezing and cracking—fill each one almost to the top with drainage stone. This also strengthens the structure.

B. Prop the planters. To conform the soil to the irregular Worcester rock border, as shown, use 2x4s to wedge up and prop the base of the walls. It will be removed later during the next course. If you do, be sure to use a lamp post. We've also used 2x4s to prop the walls to the ground at 1-foot intervals.

C. Lay the final courses. Layer the final two courses on top of the landscape fabric; then add the cap blocks, finish side-up, inside and out, to fit as needed. (For custom cuts, create your own scoreline by chiseling a V-shaped groove all the way around the block.) Top off the planters with potting soil and plant your favorite blooms. ■



SEASON PREMIERE

"We're in *Beginning* October 5" as we begin renovation on a nearly 300-year-old George Washington-era catnip National Register of Historic Places.



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spruce-ups
under

\$75

Upgrade your home and yard in a weekend with simple, stylish, and wallet-friendly DIY improvements—most of which can be done in less than an hour

By Josh Gershtof



1. Wallpaper an alcove

1 Highlight an alcove

By wallpapering the back wall. Similar to shown: First@Hand, pre-pasted wallpaper, \$64 for a 60-square-foot roll. yorkwall.com

2 Create a window kitchen herb garden.

Soften left window seats to the side jumbo and insert tempered glass shelves. Two 3 inch deep shelves for a standard 30 inch double hung. \$64; diningglassandmore.com

3 Put in a polished brass peephole with a fish eye lens and a sliding metal cover so that you can see who's at the door before you open it.

Up: \$40; [Hardwax.com](http://www.Hardwax.com) Down: O-Scops, \$12; eBay.com

4 Build a wall shelf to serve as a nightstand and the up space in a small bedroom.

Make one out of a vintage roof's rafters supported by carved wood carrels. About \$70 in materials at [houzz.com](http://www.houzz.com). Get the how to at thehouse.com/ed2011

5 Replace your rusted shower caddy with a corrosion-proof stainless steel model that has edge fabric shelves to accommodate various container bottles. *Simple Houseware Acrylic Shower Caddy* \$30; contamintore.com

6 Brighten your kitchen with a small fruit tree, and harvest fresh oranges in the winter whenever you'd like. *Dwarf Washington Navel Orange Tree* \$40; fourwindsgrowers.com

7 Customize plain white roller shades by decorating them with a beloved motif. *Stencils* start at \$8 each; designerlinens.com. *Ranger Studio Fabric Paint* \$5.50 for 2 ounces; kmart.com



11. Give a garden ornamental petting

8 Create privacy screening on your porch by hanging floor-to-ceiling outdoor curtains with grommet-style tops that slip right onto rods—no privacy clip required. *Parasol fabric panels* in a wide range of colors, patterns, and sizes, starting at \$30 each; lowes.com

9 Make your own design-look pendant light by attaching a colorful fabric drum shade to a corded plug-in socket. Shown: *Euro Filter Retro Honeycomb Drum Shade* in navy \$58 with a 15 percent discount for 70th week's *StudioLight.com*. *White Electrical Cord Swing Kit* \$30; worldmarket.com

10 Hang a cottage-style drying rack on the



9. Make a pendant light

laundry tower, dry-fit fabric and have an energy bulb. *Abundant Earth's* expandable wood accordion model has a shelf for detergent and a shade from washshop mill ends from sustainably harvested trees. \$75; abundantearth.com

11 Get the look of a vintage garden ornament without the price. Buy a new piece and weather it yourself by lightly sanding the surface and applying a faux rust finish. Then leave it outside to further develop its aged patina. *Seneca's* shows: *Copper Craftman* \$6 each; *Fading Anniversary Garden Statues* \$47; *lowes.com*. *Scrapwood and Freshies Rust Antiquing Solution* \$6.50 for a 4-ounce bottle; rustydeco.com

12 Replace fabric window shades with attractive shades by feeding the links over existing pulleys, and attaching them to the shade's inside the jamb pockets. *Copper Dipped Steel Shade Chain Kit* \$39 for 100 feet; tomtomabout.com. *Window* cathchen.com

13 Install an articulating showerhead so that bath batters won't have to

sleep. *Chromefinished nickel* and *downpour showerhead* with 9-inch adjustable arm \$73; plumberysupply.com



14. Move shelves on a wooden wall

14 Add storage to the attic using shelf brackets that hang next to slanted walls. *Easy Mount adjustable brackets* \$2 each; *anti-drip design shelves* \$35 each; easyc.com

15 Double the linen closet by tucking towels and washcloths in the pockets of a hanging shoe organizer that hooks on the inside of the door. *24 Pocket Cotton Divider Shoe Rack* \$25; eukaner.com

16 Add decorative push plates to a swinging door and *rubbed bronze* *Push Plate* \$50 per pair; charlesworthhardware.com



18. Only unmatched chairs with paint



19. Organize your entry

17 Mount a battery-powered picture light to a bookcase to highlight a collection inside. *Halcyon Times Concept Cordless Picture Light* \$84; lightinguniverse.com

18 Create a set of colorful dining chairs out of mix-and-match

stools that look by painting them all the same hue. *Similar to above*, *Yoko Colorhouse* *leaves* *sempino* in *Denim*. *Set* \$36 per gallon; homedepot.com

19 Hang a mail-and-key holder by the front door. *First part* is a *light* *hook* so that it grips on the wall. *Target Home Mail Holder with Key Hooks* \$9.99; target.com. *Rust Olsson American Accents* *space* *paint* in *35 colors* \$7.49 per can; amazon.com

20 Use a small closet with cedar panels. *Ever True Cedar V Groove Plywood Paneling* \$56 for two boxes; enough to cover 30 square feet; lowes.com

21 Free up the kitchen counter by tucking the microwave into a wall-filing cubby. *Dark Microwave Shelf Kit* 30 by 48 inches \$47; ikea.com

22 Paint a border on bathroom walls to match accent tiles in your shower enclosure. *Shirley's*



30. Create a closet space

remnant tile for the stone to match colors by computer. *30th bathroom paint* \$32 per quart; homedepot.com

23 Add a towel in a kid's room on an adhesive-backed wall mount that you can easily remove without marring the underlying finish if your little one's tastes change. *Towelpaper by You* \$56 for a 50-square-foot roll; sempaperdesigns.com

24 Make old wood look new again by covering scratches, nicks, and medium-tone species, such as maple and oak, using a *Dark Tone* *Altered Black* \$9.99; rockwell.com

25 Trade towel racks for a swing-out bar that allows damp towels to dry before showers. Bonus: Double Arm Swinging Towel Rack \$75, stuckandstuck.com

26 Trick out a built-in bar by tucking rope lights beneath the countertop cushion. Warm White LED Rope Light with mounting hardware \$29 for 3 feet; projectslighting.com

27 Maximize natural light in an entryway by decorating a wall with reflective framed mirrors in different shapes and sizes. Similar to shown: Mirrors mirror \$30; Kaja oval mirror \$30; and Kaja round mirror \$25; kaja.com

28 Hang a rope swing to turn into that 's it least 5 inches thick. Use a 1/2-inch stainless-steel eyebolt secured with a washer and two nuts. Swing with double-shaped wood seat. \$48; theoriginalmoving.com

29 Silence the door by replacing your old seal with one that has a slide-close mechanism. White American Standard elongated seal \$69, bates.com

30 Cover the fibers on a concrete stoop with tiles that let out moisture in your climate. Small batches of retirement tiles, typically \$2 or less per square foot, through online classified sites, such as ziprecruiter.com



25
Arm-swinging towel bar on a rotating bar

32 Put kitchen utensils within easy reach by hanging them from a modular utility rail mounted on the backsplash. ClosetMaid KitchenRail System \$35, closetmaid.com

33 Make a cold frame out of an old window and scrap lumber to extend the growing season for veggies. Find a divided light window at thrift centers for \$5. Guard against lead paint chips, which can contaminate the soil, by sealing the old lead under a clear coat.

34 Build a cell phone charging station. A power strip for the charger plugs into the side, and phones sit on top. Use 1/4-in.

thick plywood for a base, 1/2-in. for spacers and hinged 1/4-in. for the base. Includes the box for the strip, a cord, and multiple holes with tap for the charger leads that fuel the phones. About \$40 in materials at lumberyards.

35 Add a little color to a bathroom with a little open-air style with a bottle opener that looks like a bottle of perfume. Smokey Wall Mount Bottle Opener in polished chrome \$18; efructs.com

36 Clear a bathroom sink deck by installing the Victorian Vanity and Storage Wall Mounted Toilet Brush and Tumbler Holder \$30; bedandhandbeyond.com

37 Mirror a door's paneled recess in one cut to suit at a glass shop. Then place it in place 20 by 70-inch mirror about \$70, and Lipid Nails Mirror Adhesive \$4.29 for a 32-ounce tube. acofairdivanetel.com

38 Make a matched card table. Different sizes and materials work together when they're all the same color. Paint metal or wood finds. Then spray paint with enamel. Try Valparaiso Blue Colors in Gloss Blue, about \$6 per can. lowes.com

39 Add a motion detector to a built light so that nobody has to trudge through the dark on the way to the loo. LooLoo occupancy sensor light switch \$28, usafirehome.com



36
Put in a graphic backsplash

40 Tile the walls above your bath vanity with graphic ceramic squares. Adhere the new backsplash with mortar, grout the joints and squeeze a bead of caulk where the tiles meet the countertop. Similar to shown:

4 by 4 inch Moroccan Tiles available \$1.20 each; finecraftsartparts.com

41 Create a pull-out pet feeder in a cabinet. Use a saw to make an opening in the cabinet.

making, and order a custom drawer to fit inside. Add a plywood top with cutouts for stainless-steel bowls, and line the underside of the drawer with felt to protect your floors and make it easier for the drawer to slide. Custom drawer \$25; drawer builder.com. Henry duty adhesive felt \$4, homedepot.com

42 Install wood corner shelves to take advantage of unused space. Use a new corner conditioners off the ground. Corner Corner Shelf \$16 for two; homedepot.com

43 Pump up flattened armchair cushions by replacing the stuff with a high-density foam insert that'll hold its shape longer. EverFlo

44 foam insert costs a typical 22 by 24 inches about \$41, including a Dacron wrap to keep the cushion cover light and wrinkle free. lawnborder.com

44 Use kitchen utensil dividers to tidy up grooming supplies. In your bathroom, surely. The sold Wood Expandable Drawer Organizer fits drawers from 12 to 23 inches wide. \$25; cherryblog.com

45 Cover space jars in a wood rack on the back of a cabinet to clear the countertop. New a-Shelf Adjustable Door Mount Spice Rack \$62; cabinetparts.com

46 Get the look of bronze planters by spray-painting thrift plastic pots with a metallic brown spray. Rayl Olsen Universal in Driven Hammered \$12; amazon.com

47 Plant a distinctive indoor garden in a Victorian-style tabletop greenhouse. Trevison Rustic Dusty planter \$69; glassandwood.com, which also sells plants and supplies to keep them healthy.



46
Recycle pots in planters



41
Make a pull-out pet feeder

48 Use rubber dogs as drapery tiebacks.

Colorful style D-shaped ornaments have a traditional look. Cast from Scroll Design Studios. **\$26** per pair. houseofsculldesign.com

49 Dress up a mantel with a wood applique.

Put finish to the test: Is your oil or paint, stain or finish, face and vintage bed it shing nails to secure it in place. Tell nail holes and show. **\$22.95** each. houseofsculldesign.com

50 Put your kids' doodles in frames.

Frames from second-hand store or new ones made from reclaimed wood and colored to look like fine art. Handmade Narrow rustic frame. 11 by 14 inches. **\$96**. mybamwoodbusiness.com

51 Give stock kitchen cabinets a custom appeal.

by adding a wood-grain finish to the ends and corners and painting them to match the cabinets. 5 milliar to show. Maple-grooved base. **\$29** each and corner feet. **\$25** each. sandyvans.com

52 Make a floral doorknob.

wood insert for the wall and

\$1. Per foot on your reflects



48. *Do it best draper with rubber dogs*

add a corner to the bumper-top. Paint the assembly to match your trim. **\$22.95** each. houseofsculldesign.com



56. *Reinforced on burn sink*

53 Hide the tangle of cords and cables under your desk.

them in a hole in the desk. **\$39**. cablekeeper.com

54 Hang a porch swing.

from galvanized pipe. **\$70**. dofbest.com

55 Turn a ceramic vase into a table lamp.

with a new shade. **\$25**. houseofsculldesign.com

56 Top the sink cabinet with a wood shelf.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

57 Swap the swing-arms on a screen door for a solid door.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

58 Give your garage floor a new look.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

59 Mount a ceramic welcome sign.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

60 Exchange your plastic hanger for a seagull.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

61 Highlight your front porch with a shade.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

62 Pretty up the kitchen sink area.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

63 Make table-protecting coasters from old glass.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

64 Graze table-insect in your garden.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

65 Replace plastic drop-out splash blocks with bamboo.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

66 Plant a moss garden in a shady spot.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

67 Display a collection of vintage postcards.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

68 Add a dry-erase message board.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

69 Install a foot scraper.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

70 Dress up your double-hung windows.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

71 Hang a rain chain.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

72 Pump tunes to your porch, patio, or deck.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

73 Stencil a cast-iron stove foot.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

74 Give a string brass chandelier a rustic look.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com

75 Install a medallion around a ceiling fan.

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76 Make a message center.

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86 Give a string brass chandelier a rustic look.

for a 4-foot length of sink. **\$45**. houseofsculldesign.com



68. *Make a message center*



56. *Reinforced on burn sink*



see photos of all 75 spruce-ups
► For details of these updates and how to do them, visit www.houseofsculldesign.com

“We had six months to make it livable!”

The house had no heat or running water. But this turn-of-the-century Queen Anne caught the eye of a young couple with a gutsy plan to revive it.

My fiancée, Merle, and I wanted an old house and found ourselves drawn to Newburgh, New York, where the streets are lined with Victorian mansions. An 1887 Queen Anne, encased in a photo of a house but with no good octagonal tower intact, stood out from the crowd. We asked for five bedrooms, two baths, four fireplaces, and about 2,200 square feet, a waiting enough to rule our lives around it. At \$44,800, it seemed like an unbeatable deal.

We knew it needed work. At some point the house had been converted to a two-family, with bleak little kitchens upstairs and down. None of the fireplaces functioned, the plumbing and wiring were kaput, and holes in the roof meant it rained, destroying much of the third floor—where Merle, a filmmaker, envisioned her office. Shortly after closing, the former owner's daughter dropped by for a farewell look. Walking around the kitchen, she suddenly felt her foot go right through the floor.

Did I mention that the house had been condemned? The kitchen floor was saggy because a blocked water pipe had leaked, soaking saw-ye down inside a wall. Moldy carpet, peeling paint, and dangling ceiling tiles greeted us at every turn, and the water damaged third floor was as unsalvageable as mine's nose.

But then there was that magical tower, holding eight-sided rooms on all three floors. A friend showed us a picture of the house taken just four years after it went up, and we knew that with new siding and a restored porch, it could once again stand proud.

Though Merle was fairly new to the world of home renovations, I'd found a few places, most recently a



[Before]

the front exterior

BEFORE Homeowners Merle Bender and Chris Hansen in front of the house after the crumbling first and second floor porches came down.

AFTER Colorful vinyl siding, new roof shingles and a porch re-created with salvaged period trim brought the Queen Anne back to life.



Photographs by Tris Givens // Styling by Doc Leffers

1920s house in the same area of upstate New York, while working as a sturgeon. Of course, making this place livable was going to be a real challenge, and the only way to afford it was to do the work ourselves.

A local bank agreed to lend us the full purchase price plus the cost of renovations, but with a silver-gilt string attached. We would have just six months to make any major structural fixes and get the plumbing and electrical up to code.

Our plan, which our friends unanimously deemed crazy, was this: I'd ignore my other work and do the demolition and structural repairs full-time while Merle would log hours in a garage and on weekends stripping off wallpaper and pulling up carpets and linoleum. We'd hire a carpenter to measure the main porch, using the 1894 plan as a guide. And because Newburgh requires plumbing and roofing by town-licensed pros, we'd get help there, too.

We started ourselves as we prepared to move in. It was February and freezing. But we sat nesting in one hallway, and we could hear pigeons cooing under the floorboards at our bedside. Before the end of move-in day we got hit by an other surprise. The old water main burst. So no running water.

"During our first week in the house, we darted past bats nesting in a hallway and fell asleep to pigeons cooing under the floorboards."

We joined a gym for its showers, started "bouncing" water from a neighbor's spigot—and learned to pee in a bucket. Goosy, yes, but true. Without water, we also had no heat. That meant sleeping in jeans and sweaters, and throwing on coats when venturing beyond the bedroom.

While waiting for the water main to be replaced—it would end up taking a couple of months—we made new wiring our priority. Some rooms had no outlets, and the ones that did supplied voltage too weak to run power tools. Luckily, I was able to make wires through walls, so I didn't have to go through them. (In fact, for Merle and I, it was almost about preserving the place whenever possible.)

To stay on schedule for the plumbers—who would be putting in a boiler and water heater, replacing several radiators and water lines, and roughing in our kitchen and a new first-floor bath—we set up shop in the living room with a table saw and a sawhorse for stripping floors and adding another coat to the salvaged parlor molding.

Back when the house had been converted to a two-family, a tiny bath was jammed into a corner of the main kitchen. I decided to take it out and let the kitchen redoubt



the foyer

BEFORE: The hallway and entry part were covered in old varnish and black paint. **BELOW:** Merle and Chris stripped and stained the woodwork. Several 1940s magazine covers found in the house were in a small gallery. **LEFT:** A painted medicine set off a more fixture and echoes Chris's street-work wallpaper. Wallpaper: a Beachcomber.



the kitchen

BEFORE: Extensive water damage had made a sad situation worse. **RIGHT:** After gutting the room and allowing a dry bath, the homeowners finished the kitchen with a custom tile floor and a breakfast bar fashioned with no-hopping floor boards and cedar steps to cover from previous projects. **BELOW:** Sunny with crisp white trim and cabinets, not to mention aluminum backspash (brighter the cleanest). For added warmth, the ceiling was painted a warm, brown color. **COLLECT:** I saw a 1940s poster. Wallpaper: a Florida Gold poster picture in it.



WHAT we did

Plot by day, we converted 2800 Queen Avenue to what had been vacant for about three years.

Cost: \$150,000 plus per labor. **Top floor:** Six months to get more plumbing, electrical and structural issues fixed and out. Close to two years to complete the main floor and back porch, and new siding.

Where we saved: Negotiated the layout the way it was. Did the demolition, reframing, rewiring, insulation, and concrete work ourselves. Shopped at home centers and salvage yards.

Where we splurged: Energy-efficient windows, and granite tile countertops on the island and breakfast bar.

What we would do differently: Got the central island of vinyl sheet and reduced the second-floor porch.

Biggest challenge: Getting work done quickly, even with a home bus.

How we solved it: Living in the house while struggling to stay ahead of the plumbers and roofers.

Floor plan: On the first floor, a small bathroom and a spare room became a full bath. The second floor is a kitchen, a bath, and the adjacent bath, laundry room.



the space usage. We realized we needed to refinish and insulate walls in the kitchen, so Merle added insulation to herself (so far as we do—handmade, gabled bannisters and pry bars, and took it down to the studs.

We found the original hearth would remain the perfect spot for the stove. While riling the surround, I caught sight of a piece of plywood and paid it loose, and a ton of bricks came crashing through the flue within inches of my head. Guess that was one way to remove the remnants of a crumbling chimney. At least we were able to use the bricks to line a path in the backyard.

The other challenge got a new cap and gas insert, and a window company replaced 33 windows. With help from a plumber, we turned a spare room into a spacious downstairs bath, converted the upstairs kitchen to a bathroom, and made the old upstairs bath a laundry room.

Six months later, we made our deadline—with an exception to finish the siding. With the loan in hand we were able to pause and plan other fixes in the rest of the house.

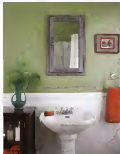
Under the old linoleum and canvas floor covering, we found painted yellow pine in good condition, and we sanded and finished it with a dark stain. Plaster repair and paint made the biggest difference, especially on the second floor, where the bedrooms were in decent shape. We patched the floor in places where it couldn't be saved and moved on to the third floor, where we had already added insulation and now painted and put down a hardwood floor. Merle was finally able to furnish her second office just as she'd dreamed.

With the interior near completion, we turned to the exterior—and the home got its last laugh. We had hoped to restore the siding, but when we ripped off the asphalt shingles it was too far gone. Cedar shingles just weren't in the budget, so we mimicked a period look with vinyl.

Fast forward nearly a decade from the day the deed changed hands. Now insured and well reasoned, we often forget how rough these first months were. Naturally, there are things we'd change, like rebuilding the porch with *insulating instead of permeable* for fast enough time has passed that we're banking for another big project. I know there's another renovation in us. Please put us in any future house be one that isn't condemned. ■

the living + dining rooms

BEFORE: Arlene's great aunt made the living room fireplace functional once again. Chris and Merle sanded and stained the pine floor themselves. **BELOW:** In the original dining room, the couple created a vintage look with painted pressed cardboard cutting glass and a collection of gold-toned plates was the only Merle has never played on as a kid. The chandelier came from a home center. **RIGHT:** Napa's a local wine shop. **BELOW:** Mahogany dining room.



the first-floor bath

BEFORE: Damaged plaster walls, prior to being scraped, sanded, and skim coated. **LEFT and ABOVE:** The homeowners added hardwood wallpaper and a cap under the floor and ceiling existing and new tiles refinished. The pedestal sink cost \$40 at a vintage yard, and the medicine cabinet was a \$10 yard sale find. **RIGHT:** Napa's a local wine shop.



the rear exterior

BEFORE: The last up asphalt siding and damaged shingles had to go. **RIGHT:** Chris and Merle, with their new back porch deck and landscaped yard. Some of the front- and back-porch toadlets were housed inside the house, and Chris made others to match.



don't pay over \$200, minus \$250

Did you remodel your house within most of the work yourself? If so, we offer to loan about your project. Please send copies of before and after photos, a floor plan, and a brief description of the work you did (we will return any materials) by:

The DIY House Reader Remodels
125 West 30th Street, 30th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Or a mail image and information to readerremodel@kissmedia.com

Your \$200 is a payment of \$250 if your house is featured.

PROJECT: CRISP BATH MAKEOVER

—JESSICA BELL, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.



Remodeling is a never-ending itch that won't let go, but for Jessica Bell, who co-chaired her family's agoraphobia, it was also a drive for her personality. "I needed a project to keep me busy while my husband was deployed," says American Beauty Army Major Jessica Bell, who spent a year in Iraq. It began when Jessica—married in June, 6, and Lake, 3—found a Colorado realtor to help her find an undermount sink on sale for just \$79. After ripping out her bathtub (and its tub top), she put in her marble-look porcelain freestanding and added new hardware. Then, seeing that the rest of the bath looked drab by comparison, she added beadboard wall paneling, painted the walls, and tiled the floor with white mosaic. For moral support and construction advice, Jessica called her dad as often as three times a day. The thing went well, but while removing the new marble top to add the undermount, the stone cracked. Jessica found a replacement, but this time it cost her \$325. "I learned to wait and do the whole project at once to avoid such mishaps," she says. As for her husband's reaction to the new bath, and to remodeling in general? "He doesn't want to do the work—but he likes it when I do it while he's away!"

THE PROJECT TALLY

Removed the vanity and sink, replaced with cabinets and added toilet	\$30
Installed undermount sink, undermount toilet (at \$79 for both items)	\$125
Replaced the old toilet	\$60
Demanded the old sink, toilet, new hardware, and tiled with white mosaic tiles	\$327
Added the beadboard wall paneling and other remodeling	\$380
Added up under light fixture	\$79
Painted the walls, new ceiling and added a new ceiling fan	\$469
Painted the walls	\$15
Added new floors	\$15

TOTAL \$1,810



BEFORE: A laminate-topped vanity and acrylic vinyl tiles made the bath look old and dingy. White paint and a new marble top on the vanity, and mosaic floor tiles and beadboard wall paneling, are fresh modern touches with vintage appeal.

PROJECT: CLASSIC KITCHEN REDO

—CHRISTINE AND DOMINIC COSTA, ROYAL OAK, MICH.



In long-lived DIY remodels, some projects get stuck in the slow lane. For Christine and Dominic Costa, that was their cramped cook space that lingered. After making room for their 850-square-foot 1932 ranch, the couple waited three years to replumb their energy—and their wallets—before devising a plan to maximize storage in their kitchen without raising any walls. The couple started by tearing out everything, including a space-hogging set of built-in drawers. They installed a base cabinet on one side to add a new plywood cabinet (and painted it black) on the other side with a new roller range. Open shelves, made of a hollow-core door, and a glossy white subway-tile backsplash lightened the look. To fill the new grayish-blue-painted subway tile, Christine made a find: molding she liked to use as a replacement window, she made some large 16" x 16" x 1/2" to fit around the frame, beveled their edges, and coated them a bright white paint, she says. The only thing the gear left to the pros was the granite countertop and the floor. Working weekends in between Christine's (she's a graduate student) and their full-time jobs, the project took just two months. Aside from remodeling in the space, the best part has been their family's reaction. "My dad's a carpenter and he did a thorough inspection," says Christine. "Blowing him out the parking, train, and the work was priceless."

THE PROJECT TALLY

Collected the space, installed new cabinets, replaced the window, undermount sink, toilet	\$650
Painted and installed new cabinets, undermount sink, toilet	\$1,195
Had a new granite countertop installed	\$1,000
Added a new toilet, a toilet, and a toilet	\$340
Covered the sink with a new sink, and a sink	\$10
Grouted the tiles, and a sink	\$20
1" thick floor with 16 inch square tiles	\$100
Bought a dishwasher and a sink, a sink, and a sink	\$110

TOTAL \$4,753



They used a paint sprayer to get a light gray finish on their cabinets.



BEFORE: With no room for a dishwasher and a bulky sink, the kitchen (shown without the range) looked cluttered and much needed storage space. After, Opting for a smaller range and removing the sink, the couple gained critical inches for the sink appliance and to fit more wall cabinets.



PROJECT: SPACE-SAVING NURSERY BUILT-IN

BY SAMANTHA AND BRYAN LANGLENS, WATERBURY, CONN.



When Samantha and Bryan Langlen learned they were expecting twins, they took out the measuring stick and had a fresh look at the 11-by-12-foot bedroom earmarked for the nursery in their 1948 Cape Cod-style house. "There was just no way to fit two cribs, cribs, rockers, the dresser, the closet, and a changing table," says Samantha, who works in marketing. Window placements and the need to fit in a large glider chair in the corner of the room for nursing both babies added to the challenge. Dash-to-be Bryan, a designer-carpenter, eyed the closet and came up with the solution. It didn't hang out. After exposing the closet cavity, Bryan was able to fill it in with a storage-packed built-in complete with a changing table and drawers for diapers, bottles, and clothing. There's also a row of cubbies used to hold fabric-lined rattan bins the couple already had, and a 7-foot vertical cabinet for extra clothes and linens, with a teddy bear bookshelf along the top. Bryan even put recessed LED puck lights above the changing table as a distance-to-double-as-a-nursery night light. But the sweetest touch of all: "One day when we were building, I pulled the carpenter pencil out from behind my ear and wrote a note on the flaming behind a drawer—'Built with love by your parents—and put the date," says Bryan. For twin boys Ryder and Mason, born last February, it may someday be a touching discovery.

DIYERS



DURING Bryan Langlen demolished a poorly functioning closet. **LEFT AND BELOW** The built-in dresser and changing table that Bryan and his wife made to fit in the closet cavity. They painted the walls green and added a tree mural to brighten a corner of the nursery.



THE PROJECT TALLY

Demolished existing closet	\$0
Sketched the design for a custom 11-ft-tall storage and 4 new chairs	\$0
Built shelves, doors, and drawer (sawdust and measure costs by hand)	\$130
Installed a 16-cu-ft cabinet as a changing table surface	\$170
Bought push latches and wood trim	\$50
Painted built-in, walls, and the post counter with white and purple enamel	\$250
Refinished and hung a mirror (founder for extra the rest)	\$0

TOTAL \$360



↑
Chasing white paint makes the ceiling pop against the first photo on the ceiling.

BEFORE A textured ceiling made the living room look dull and dated. **TOP** Coffers create drama on the cheap and add depth to the ceiling. Blue paint on the walls and chunky trim around the windows and new front door complete the look.



PROJECT: CUSTOM-LOOK COFFERS

BY JENIKA KURTZ, LOS ANGELES



The "cost agerhome" plaster ceiling in the living room of Jenika Kurtz's 2044-bungalow just had to go. Reversing clipped coffers instead, Jenika set about turning her daydream into a reality. Working with her boyfriend, Robert, with whom she shares the house and her father, Ken, the trio devised a plan incorporating stock lumber arranged as grid. After testing to ensure the ceiling didn't lose its substance (Jenika added to spray-on plaster from the 1940s and 1950s), they scraped off the masonry surface, then coated with a fresh layer of plaster to make it smooth and scraped the finish. Next, they built hollow U-shaped "beams" using 1-in. that sat on 2-in. mounting strips (Jenika found the ceiling). The face of the beams as recessed between the side walls to create a reveal and the beams' inside edges are detailed with 1/4-inch core moldings for a finished look. "Before, the room was a box," Jenika says. "With the coffered ceiling, we really made it special."

THE PROJECT TALLY

Scoreboard-plaster and plaster ceiling	\$0
Score coated the ceiling	\$36
Coated coffee beams, stock doors and trim	\$467
For shapely cuts on glass panel and the ceiling rail	\$23

TOTAL \$536

READ THIS BEFORE YOU FINISH YOUR ATTIC

Whether you envision your house's top floor as an away-from-it-all master suite, a quiet home office, or a hangout spot for the kids, don't lift a finger until you've read TOH's expert advice

BY JOSH GARDNER ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC LARSEN

ACCOUNT FOR CODES AND SAFETY

Every attic's different, but a few established norms and practices will guide your renovation.

• Follow the "rule of 75" (Enforcement varies, but codes typically say that at least half of a finished attic must be at least 7 feet high, and that this area must be a minimum of 7 feet wide and 70 square feet. A contractor or a local building official can help you assess how the rule will apply to your attic and how modifications like dormer additions might affect height and clearances.)

• Have a pro check the structure: A finished attic weighs a lot more than boxes of old seasonals. Hire an engineer to inspect your house's foundation and framing to ensure they can carry the extra load. At a minimum, you may need to strengthen the attic's floor joists, which are often too shallow or spaced too far apart for the job.

• Assess your access: If you're rebuilding a stair case from scratch, consider a switchback layout. It needs more room than a straight run (roughly 45 to 50 square feet per floor versus 33), but its footprint is more square than linear, so it will fit in places where a straight run can't go. Just make sure the landing is large enough to maneuver bulky items.



A small attic space is a great starting point for a small room.



THE BEST ATTIC LIGHTING

Recessed LED fixtures back-completingly out of the way. Don't generate unwanted heat, and can have insulation installed snugly and safely around them.



PUT IN A CEILING FAN FOR BETTER CLIMATE CONTROL

If you want a headroom, it'll make a finished attic more comfortable in warmer months by giving you a cool breeze indoors. Flip the reverse switch in winter time and it'll push warmer air down to keep you cozy.

MAKE THE MOST OF ATTIC STORAGE

Here are our favorite strategies for stashing away all your prized possessions.



PROCESS IT INTO KNEE WALLS
Penetration drawers, cabinets, and cubbies save space. Get the low to go on using a chest of drawers at the end of the room or a set of cubbies at the end of the room.



USE EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY
Even awkward nooks—alongside eaves and wall pipes, chairs, or near low walls—offer an opportunity for installing off-the-wall shelving.



DELINEATE SPACE WITH IT
Look for ways to work storage into the room's interior. A half wall along a staircase doubles as a bookshelf next to a home office.



CONSIDER BUMPING IN
If there's no room for recessed storage, go the other way. Built-in cabinets with drawers or doors below make handy storage bins.



MAKE EMERGENCY EGRESS EASIER

Required by code for bedrooms, a good idea for any attic room is a window that can be used for an escape in case of an emergency. An attic wall rope ladder installed beneath a hidden cabinet door will give you extra peace of mind. From \$299, egressescapeadders.com

PUT TWIN BEDS HEAD-TO-HEAD

Save your cash: place beds side-by-side under opposite eaves. But this fun arrangement will allow kids to play together before falling asleep. Plus, it frees up the other side of the attic for a different use.



TWO HANDY THINGS TO HAVE WHEN IT'S FINISHED

1. A broom closet to house cleaning supplies you won't want to lug upstairs again and again. Including a spare vacuum cleaner.
2. A wireless doorbell or a doorbell with a hard-wired doorbell. Hook it up and the two will ring in tandem so you'll never miss an important delivery or guest again. \$37, smarthome.com

PUT IT ON ITS OWN THERMOSTAT

Your attic has a climate of its own: warmer in both summer and winter, if it's well insulated. For maximum comfort, create a separate zone within your HVAC system for the finished space. There's a chance you'll need to enlarge the system if your attic wasn't heated or cooled previously, so call in a pro to make sure it's up to snuff.

get ideas for your renovation from our 2013 book of finished attic bedrooms, walls, and more ideas at theadhouse.com/attic2013

4 Our cast of veteran experts

TOM DAVIS
General ContractorNORM ABRAMS
Modern CarpenterNICKOLAS TRECH-HEWITT
Plumbing and Heating SpecialistROGER COOK
Landscape ContractorKEVIN O'CONNOR
Fire

How does quartersawn lumber differ from flatsawn? Which one is better?

—SARAH SWICKER, ASHLAND, OHIO

A quick glance at the tree rings at the end of a board tells you what the wood is: quartersawn or flatsawn. The former has a grain pattern either kind of wood. It all depends on how it's milled.

Flatsawn lumber



Quartersawn lumber



Norm Abrams replies: You can clearly see the difference if you look at the growth rings at the end of a board. When the rings run at an angle between 60 and 90 degrees to the board's face, that's quartersawn, or what's sometimes called vertical grain. Boards with growth rings angled at less than 45 degrees to the face of the board are flatsawn, also known as plain sawn. (Anything in between is called rift saw.) The difference comes from how the log is sliced up.

Quartersawn lumber is generally more expensive than flatsawn because making it takes more time and produces more waste. Incorporated with flatsawn lumber, it's a superior product in that it's much more stable—it expands and contracts less across its width and is less likely to cup or warp. As such, it's highly desirable for siding, counter tops, furniture, and floors, particularly those laid over radiant heating elements. Paint also adheres much longer to quartersawn than to flatsawn.

I find the straight, parallel wood grain on the face of quartersawn lumber to be very attractive, and some species, such as white oak, also reveal a pattern of rays and flecks that can be quite stunning. That said, as desirable as quartersawn lumber is, it shouldn't be wasted on projects

that don't need it. Flatsawn lumber, which makes up the vast majority of wood products, is perfectly acceptable for many uses, such as framing and paint-grade interior trim.

SMOOTHING OVER TREE ROOTS

I have a tree with roots that stick up so high that I can't cut the grass with a lawnmower. Is there any way to correct this problem?

—GEORGE DECKER, ST. LOUIS, MO

Roger Cook replies: When roots are that far out of the ground, it's an indication that the soil is very poor. So first, use a grub hoe and spade fork to carefully remove the grass and loosen the soil around the roots without damaging them.

Next, cover the area with 3 to 4 inches of topsoil, but don't pile it up against the trunk. Blend the topsoil with the loosened soil, work it, then mow! You'll end up with slightly higher ground around the tree, of course, but it'll be much easier to mow and a lot more to look at than those scraggly, unembedded roots.

Finally, put a ring of mulch around the trunk to keep the mower away from the bark. And give the grass a little extra water and fertilize so it can compete with the tree.

ON THE-JOB SAFETY WITH CONCRETE
It's important to wear a dust mask when mixing concrete?

—RICK ROGUE, ARIZONA, TEX.

Kevin O'Connor replies: Yes, it is. A standard particle mask from a home center offers enough protection, a full-face respirator would be overkill.

It's also good to wear skin-protecting gloves to protect your hands

WHAT IS IT?



1. Digging for plants
2. Taping head for drywall
3. Depth gauge for self-leveling concrete
4. Or...

FOR THE LARGER IMAGE



One way to block weeds from growing up between bricks is to fill the joints with polymeric sand. A mix of sand and plastic that forms rock-hard once it gets wet.

from wet concrete and to avoid anything with it all if it gets on your skin or clothes. And don't forget safety glasses or goggles—they'll keep your eyes safe from dust and splinters.

BRICK JOINTS THAT STOP WEEDS

I have a 25-by-30-foot brick patio on a sandbed. Unfortunately, weeds and grass keep growing up through the joints, which range from about 1/4 to 1/2 inches wide. Worse, I think water seeping through the patio is causing problems in my basement. Could I replace the sand with gravel?

—JOE POARD, HOPKINSVILLE, KY

Roger Cook replies: I don't think you can get gravel into a joint that's only 1/4 inch wide, and even if you could, the gravel would be messy and leave stains on the brick. Here are a couple of better ways to block weeds and reduce or stop

water migration through the joints. Start by removing at least 2 inches of sand from every joint. You can dig it out with an old screwdriver, blow it out with a power washer, or each in turn with a wet-dry vac.

Once the joints are open, refill them with a dry mix of stone dust and portland cement, mixed at a ratio of 8 parts stone to 1 part dust. Or you can use a product called polymeric sand. Stone dust and cement are cheaper than polymeric sand, but the sand is finer, so you can work it into narrow joints more easily. Both products harden up nicely per manufacturer's directions to withstand some joint movement.

You apply them in the same way by broadcasting the mix over a dry patio and sweeping it into the joints. When the joints are full, carefully brush the bricks clean. Nevertheless, because sweeping left on your bricks will turn into unsightly or gritty mud, now lightly sprinkle the area with water, which carries

ask the oldhouse

the mix and handles it.

Since dust usually settles in the ever time, sweep up the joints when dust happens and sprinkle them again. Settling shouldn't be a problem with polyurethane sand.

GLUE FOR SYNTHETIC TRIM

I know that you can cut PVC trim pretty much like wood. But how do you glue the pieces together?

—JENNIFER D. COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

Norm Abrams replies: You have to use an adhesive made for bonding cellular PVC. Each manufacturer recommends using particular adhesive products, but I've found and matched adhesives on different brands without a problem. But don't use the cement that plumbers use to join PVC pipe, because it can reach too fast.

A company called Bond-Bell (bondbell.com) makes an entire product line specifi-

cally for PVC products, including one- and two-part adhesives. I like their two-part systems better because they come in various cure speeds and fill small gaps. You should only use them outdoors, however, because these adhesives contain methyl methacrylate, which emits a noxious odor until it cures in about 20 minutes.

Just keep in mind that PVC trim expands and contracts along its length with changes in temperature, and the longer the board, the more it will move. It's best not to glue every joint, if you're butt-jointing several boards together, caulk every other one with a flexible sealant, rather than using glue, so that the trim can grow and shrink as necessary.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT PILES OF WOOD CHIPS

I'm planning to chip up several trees in the wooded area around my house. Is it okay



D LEVELER

The Tucson Leveling System pipes the edges of freshly set tile, ensuring that each piece is evenly supported. Built with its ring base, after the thrust handles, the installation tool, shown, costs off the whole chip. \$150 (plus shipping and handling). Order: 200-310-0100 for tool. (tucsonleveling.com)

to leave the chips in place when they fall or should I clean up the debris and haul it away? I don't want it to attract insects or cause other problems.

—ANGIE D. CARRIE ARMONKY, NY

Roger Cook replies: It all depends on how deep the chip piles are. A layer less than 4 inches deep is no problem and will soon be absorbed as the forest plants grow through and falling leaves cover it. But anything thicker forces a tree that cannot be broken down quickly, and will probably remain visible for quite a while.

If chipping costs around, you take them out and spread them around. Wood chips attract insects and fungi that are part of the decomposition process, so leave at least a 1-foot chip-free zone around the trunk of each tree. As long as the chips aren't close to the house, I wouldn't worry about bugs.

By the way, wood chips contain nitrogen as they decompose, so if you want to

help replace what is lost, sprinkle some organic nitrogen fertilizer over the area.

REMOVING AN OIL TANK

There's an empty, unused 550-gallon fuel tank in the crawl space beneath my house. Can I leave it there while I have to get rid of it?

—MR. CARTER HUNTERSTON, NY

Richard Trethewey replies: I'd get it out of there. For one thing, an empty tank isn't really empty. It contains some oil and a good deal of sludge in the bottom, even a fire it has been dormant. And it's only a matter of time before a steel tank will rust out, leaving you with a big environmental problem. That's why most contractors are quite strict when it comes to old tanks, whether they're in the ground or not; they don't want water supplies tainted with oil. Removal is usually the only option if

lower for above-ground tanks. In some towns or states, they must be removed by a licensed professional with a removal permit.

Even if you could legally abandon your tank without removing it, you might find that having it in your crawl space will scare off potential buyers if you ever decide to sell. Removing it isn't a DIY job, though. Check with your municipality to see what's required, then find someone who can do the work safely and correctly.

send your questions to ask the oldhouse

go to: oldhouse.com/ask or write to: Ask The Old House, This Old House magazine, 120 West 60th Street, New York, NY 10020

Include complete address and daytime phone number. Questions sent out will not be sent for daily advice through our blog. We post a different reader's question each week. We reserve the right to edit questions for clarity and brevity. We are not liable for any damages or loss of property resulting from the use of the information provided.

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WITH INNOVATIVE SUPPLE BLACKOUT FOAMBACKING, MAXIMIZE ENERGY EFFICIENCY + MINIMIZE LIGHT PENETRATION AND NOISE REDUCTION.

If ordering all products, two for one window and four for the kitchen and living room in my living room. They look new and the job was done in 24 hours after they were sent. The room looked new - like it had been there for years. Amazing! The night, when I came out slowly into the 200, I was amazed with these curtains. Great job! Curtainworks!

—JAMES, TORONTO, ON

For the price, you can't get much better. They look like new and allow me to sleep effectively "out" the baby during the day. That alone makes them worth their weight in gold!

—LARRY, ALABAMA, AL

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Leaf wranglers

When the leaves start piling up the fall, don't sweat it. Our high-powered yard-clearing arsenal stands at the ready to turn that age-old chore into... well, less of one. —SAL VAGUSTA

100
Pounds of leaves
produced by a mature
shade tree each season

2.5
Number of 30-gallon bags
needed to hold
100 pounds of leaves,
sticks/brush

5
Number of trees' worth of
ground-up leaves that will
fit in one 30-gallon bag

The job here isn't
dreaded, but the leaves
sure pile up. Settle down,
homeowners: some
good—and some bad—
advice. But any of these
will point the way faster
than a lone rake.

leaf-blower roundup

► For hands-on review of the cordless
models, check out our roundup
in [this issue's cover story](#).

what to look for

1. **Rated horsepower**
and a five-minute look
at the motor's output.

2. **A clear look**
through the tube with a
spring-loaded
release that won't
come loose.

3. **Material quality**,
stronger and more
durable than most
plastic ones.

4. **Vacuum tubes**
you can attach and
take off without
needing a tool.

5. **An easy-start**
engine like this one,
where cord takes 20
percent less force to
yank it in than
previous models.

GAS-POWERED BLOWER VAC ECHO ES-255

\$130; 8.7 pounds; [echo-usa.com](#)

Every blower-vac (ECHO calls it a push-blower) also
also designed from the ground up. The Echo
actually lives up to the promise, thanks largely to
four steel blades that instantly reduce wet and
dry leaf volume by 32 to 1. In blower mode, the
easy-start 2-cycle engine smoothly cranks out 342
cubic feet per minute (cubic ft./min.) of air, plenty of power
to clear a yard with a handful of trees. That said,
using it—or any other corded blower—beyond three
30-minute jobs (say, We ran it for 18 hr. about
an hour before the fuel tank needed a refill.

Five pros: Blower speed, 342 cfm at 150 mph;
70 decibels (dB).

CORDED BLOWER VAC WORK TRI-VAC WG500

\$190; 8.4 pounds; [worktools.com](#)

Unlike most blower-vacs, there's no
need to keep tabs for measuring
and blowing. Each tool's nozzle is
built in—and flip a switch to change
modes. Reach is limited by the length
of your extension cord, but on the
outside, the 32-amp motor will never
run out of gas or need a fuel line. But
its plastic injection-molded body and
volume by 10 to 1, but not surprisingly
struggled with wet leaves.

Five pros: Blower speed, 380 cfm at
250 mph; maximum 70 dB.

Plan of attack

Keep from chasing in circles
with this systematic strategy.

A. Clear back corners. Either
suck them up with a blower vac
or use the blower nozzle-down at
the corner to blast out the leaves.

B. Use the wheel. Start on the
yard's upwind side and blow with
the breeze.

C. Go to the perimeter. Go around
the edge of the property, working
from back to front at
corner to corner, clearing
leaves. Extract any stuck leaves within
3 in. of the wheel.

D. Move to the lawn. Direct
discharge toward the center
of the lawn and concentrate there
in one or more medium-size
piles. Gather any clump with a
24-inch leaf rake.



TIP: A good leaf rake—one with thick plastic tines, a 24-inch-wide head,
and a wood handle—is the best way to clean off small lawns and a must
for getting any leaves a blower can't. —ROGER GOOD, TOP-LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR



Quiet, please!

Pushpower's sleek backpack
blower (5647) pumps out
473 cfm at air at 177 mph
while keeping the noise level
to an average-friendly 64
dB—better, louder than a
conventional 564, many
ordinances restrict the hours
when a blower of any type
can be operated. 5400
20 pounds, \$449; [pushpower.com](#)



40dB 50dB 60dB 70dB
noise level (dB) comparison
Decibel (dB) comparison



CORDESS BLOWER RYOBI P2102

\$199; 4.2 pounds; [ryobitools.com](#)

For small areas, like a porch
sidewalk, leave the tube in the shed
and use the lightweight
18-volt battery-powered blower.
You get a nice little gust at the pull
of the trigger, with no worries about
maintenance or the limited reach of
a cord. The lithium-ion battery lasts
about 15 minutes runtime and takes
about 60 minutes to recharge.

Five pros: Blower speed, 200 cfm
at 120 mph; 55 dB.

PUSH BLOWER CUB CADET JS 1150

\$499; 37 pounds; [cubcadet.com](#)

For expensive, free-laid yards with
backseeds, a blower vac is
blower with a heavy-duty 200-cc
gas engine in the leaf-oval way to clear
off the lawn. (At that point, you want
to toss the leaves into a chipper
shredder like the one straight.) The
38-pound vac is easy enough in its
own right, but you'll want to
push your way through it—it's
a bit louder than a mower.

Five pros: Blower speed, 1,000 cfm
at 150 mph; 100 dB.

CHIPPER-SHREDDER TROY-BILT CS4265

\$660; 200 pounds; [troybilt.com](#)

Need to cut down on the pile-down to
cut? The topper of the heavy-duty
line of shredders will do the job. Not
to mention, it's a lot less than 100
cubic ft. of leaves, and pulverizes them
with a spring-loaded and driven
steel blade. Then it sends them to a
chamber, where it's cut, cut, cut. A
separate chisel (included) with steel
leaves that branches up to 2 inches
across. The 4-cycle 205-cc gas
engine never hesitates.

Five pros: 122 dB.



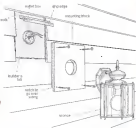
Norm's tricks of the trade



Can we install outdoor light fixtures over cedar lap siding? I'm afraid there will be ugly gaps between the back of the fixtures and the house.

—FAM KUSHNETZ, APOLO, PA.

Anything destined for an outside wall—light fixtures, outlet boxes, and dryer vents—should be attached to your mounting block and rest against the sheathing. Siding-water from a leaky spout for the fixture and under each the siding. The trick is to make the attachment weatherproof so that no water reaches the siding. Here's how to go about it.



1 First, cut a block to size out of 1/2-inch-thick or even better, no-recycling PVC. Make it just any blocks so that the two installation edges line up with full square cut edges because it looks better. Use a square-faced blade in the block to fit around the outlet box. Don't seal weatherstripping gaskets or seams in two opposite corners.

2 Hold the block up against the siding in a lower or best edge and using the block as a guide, mark the vertical center in the siding with a utility knife. Set the block aside, and use a thin knife to carefully cut away the siding along the top and the marked center. Don't cut into the siding's tail or house-wrap, or the course of siding beneath it, or the bottom edge. Break out a notch in the back of the block's bottom edge to fit over the uncured siding.

3 To stop water from getting behind the block or fitting, slip into a cap between the siding and wrap. Squeeze a flat bead of caulk around the perimeter of the cutout, press the block into it, and drive a screw through each side hole into the sheathing. Run off the fixture in the outlet box. Whenever you drive, you'll have made secure fasten base that stops water from your walls from water.

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And The Winner Is...

In our June issue, we launched our second annual Outdoor Goals Sweepstakes, a chance for one lucky reader to get a jump start on building the backyard retreat of their dreams.

Congratulations to Donna Bailey of Red House, West Virginia, who was steadily able to win out of an incredible 70,621 entries to win a \$17,500 prize package made up of these Outdoor Goals "Must Have" items.



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Our thanks to everyone who entered. Keep an eye on the pages of This Old House for more terrific contests and sweepstakes!



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